







THINKING OF THE LOVED AND LOST.

Frontispiece, see page 226.

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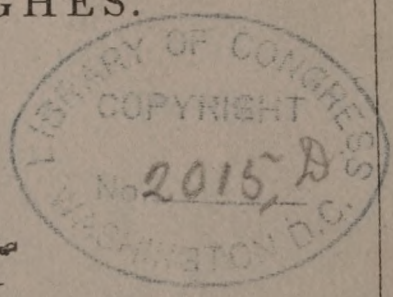
OR,

THE STORY OF A LIFE.

BY

MARGIE S. HUGHES.

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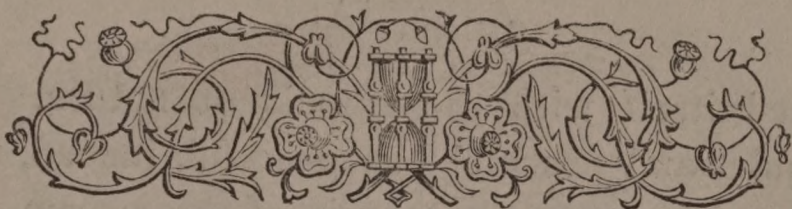
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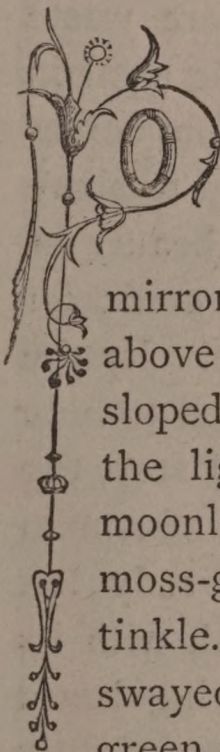


MOONLIGHT ON THE WATER.



ANNETTA.

CHAPTER I.

OVER the calm waters of a beautiful river the soft light of the moon fell gently, while upon its surface was mirrored many a bright star, shining far above it. Upon either side, the green banks sloped gradually to the water's edge, while the light breeze of evening sent the tiny, moonlit waves rippling over the pebbles and moss-grown rocks with a pleasant, musical tinkle. The trees, laden with rich foliage, swayed gracefully to and fro, bowing their green heads low, as the same busy wind swept through them, with a faint, rustling sound that seemed like a half-plaintive whisper. Now and then the twittering note of some feathered songster, safely nestled amid the branches,

mingled itself with the sounds of nature. All was quiet and peaceful—so peaceful, indeed, that one standing upon the margin of the stream, and looking upon the work of the great Creator around, above, and beneath him, might well imagine that here, at least, might be found a sure retreat from the many cares and perplexities which abound upon the world's broad field of strife.

But is the spot given up to nature alone? Shall the bright flowers of Spring here waste their fragrance, and the bird's sweet song awaken no other response than the faint echo from across the waters? Shall man not be permitted to share with the feathered warblers the quiet beauty of the place? Our queries are soon answered; for see, a tall figure appears in the distance. By the friendly light of the moon, we are enabled to note his movements. With a slow, measured step, the figure advanced, and proved to be that of a man upon whom old Father Time had already left traces of his onward march. His head, with its locks of gray, was bowed low, the flowing beard resting upon his breast. His arms were tightly folded across the broad chest, as if to still the beatings of a heart whose every throb murmured, Unrest, unrest! What, shall disquietude intrude even here? Shall any thing bearing the impress

of the world's turmoil be found amid scenes like this? Ay; though we traverse the confines of the world, tread every path which the foot of mortal has trod, still are we pursued by the restless cry of human hearts, echoing ever and ever, Unrest, unrest!

Slowly back and forth paced the solitary figure, seemingly so absorbed in his own meditations as to be wholly unmindful of all else. Time passed on. He heeded it not, continuing his walk, giving vent now and then to a few murmured words, expressive of feelings wrought up to a state of great excitement. Suddenly he started, paused, and seemed to listen for some sound from a distance. A murmur of voices arose, now quite drowning the soft music of the waters flowing at his feet. A moment later, a shout of laughter came ringing down from the cliff above, quickly followed by another, in which seemed blended a chorus of happy voices. The man evidently wished to be alone. He turned, and walking in the opposite direction, soon reached a spot where a bend in the river formed a kind of recess, quite secured from observation by the grand old trees which surrounded it. Upon the massive trunk of one of these he seated himself, resting his head upon his hand. Scarcely had he gained this retreat, before the approaching party came

in sight. With many a gay jest and repartee, mingled with laughter and snatches of song, a group of young people descended the mossy bank, by the aid of some rustic steps almost concealed from view by the dense shrubbery clustering closely around them. The party consisted of Isabel Brasure, whose home was just visible from the cliff where they stood, and her cousins, Mabel and Godfrey Moorely, with two gentlemen from the city. Each appeared to be in the gayest of spirits, evidently bent upon enjoying to the utmost all the pleasures which came within their grasp.

"Now, Miss Brasure, lead us to the elysium of which you have been giving us such glowing descriptions," cried Mr. Harwood, as he held out his hand to assist Isabel to descend.

Without accepting his proffered aid, she raised her hand with an independent gesture, shook back the curls from the bright young face, and, with a light, sure step, ran laughingly by him, reaching the bank first.

"Well done," said he. "I see you are accustomed to such means of descent."

"You may be sure Isabel made the acquaintance of those steps years ago. In truth, I'm not certain but that they were constructed for her special benefit," said her cousin Godfrey.

"And by her directions too," remarked Mabel.

"Really, Miss Brasure, you have no idea how inexpressibly astonished I am," said Mr. Winchell.

"And why, may I ask?" replied she, turning, with an air of surprise, to the speaker.

"I had no idea a young lady could ever be brought to think she could accomplish such a feat as that without assistance," answered Mr. Winchell, twirling his moustache in a style quite becoming, as he supposed, to a gentleman of means from the city. "However," added he, "I presume young ladies about here are more independent in action than our city belles; are they not, Miss Isabel?"

"I can not answer for them, I am sure," said Isabel. "As for myself, I should be sorry, indeed, to be obliged to depend upon any one for help, especially when I consider how often I should be under the necessity of remaining at home for the want of it."

"Ah," replied the young gentleman, with an exceedingly consequential air, "would that I might be ever at hand to await your pleasure!"

"Indeed," retorted Isabel, "I'm afraid the waiting would be on my part."

"Ah, now, Miss Brasure, why so cruel and unjust!" cried he, with the air of an injured prince.

"A truce to such nonsense! 'Tis idle flattery all!" exclaimed Isabel, turning to her other friends, who had now joined them.

"Nay, now, Miss Brasure, wherefore—"

"Cousin Godfrey!" cried Isabel, turning from the young exquisite, "come, we will lead the way to my favorite retreat!" and, with a quick step, she started, followed by Godfrey and the rest of the merry party, who could scarcely keep pace with the light-hearted girl, who, in a short time, had guided them to the place with which our story opens.

After spending a little while amid the quiet loveliness of Isabel's favorite haunt, each giving vent to expressions of surprise and admiration, Isabel again announced her intention of acting as guide, and bade them follow whither she led. Gayly they obeyed, and in a few moments came upon a little curve or bend; and there, just at the water's edge, a pleasure-boat was seen, fastened to its staple, moving slowly as the water surged gently beneath it.

"O, a boat, a boat! That's just the thing to complete our enjoyment! Now for a sail!" exclaimed one of the party.

"Splendid!" cried another. "Moonlight on the water is so enchanting!"

Cousin Godfrey handed the ladies into the

boat, and motioned the gentlemen to follow, while he proceeded to loosen the little white craft from her fastenings. Mr. Harwood stepped in and took his place beside Mabel Moorely; but Mr. Winchell drew back, with a look of dismay.

"Come, Mr. Winchell, plenty of room; step in!" cried the ladies, noticing his hesitation.

"But is n't it rather a dangerous undertaking?" asked he.

"Dangerous? Why, no; not in the least. Cousin Godfrey understands the management of our little boat too well to admit of a thought of danger," said Isabel.

"It's a very small affair, at any rate, and seems frail as an egg-shell," replied Mr. Winchell, looking dubiously at the boat in question.

"Time's up!" cried Mr. Harwood. "*The Water-Lily* goes promptly on time, you know!"

"Bound for the West Indies, Mr. Winchell! Shall we enroll you as a passenger?" laughed Isabel, as the gentleman still stood irresolute upon the shore, looking down at his patent-leather boots, twirling his cane into the sand, idly casting a pebble, now and then, into the circling waves.

"I'd rather be excused," said he, at length; "and really do think, young ladies, the drawing-

room at home a much more becoming place for you."

A shout of laughter followed, in the midst of which Godfrey Moorely good-humoredly stepped behind Mr. Winchell, and, with one grasp of his powerful arm, deposited the young city exquisite in the stern of the boat.

"All aboard?" shouted he; and, with a stroke of the oar, away went the *Water-Lily*, out into the stream.

A little while was given up to gay conversation and merriment; and then, from beneath his seat, Godfrey drew forth a box, from which he took a guitar. To the surprise of all, he quietly handed it to Isabel, who received it without the slightest embarrassment or expression of astonishment.

"Well," said Mr. Winchell, recovering from the momentary chagrin he had experienced upon finding himself so unceremoniously enrolled as a passenger, "that must have been understood between you; but how did you manage to bring so large a package without being noticed?"

"Was it stowed away in your vest-pocket, brother?" asked Mabel Moorely, with a mischievous smile.

"It belongs to the *Water-Lily*," answered Godfrey.

"O, it's a fixture here, is it?—then I've no



THE PLEASURE-PARTY.

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doubt it is used often. Well, at all events, that proves that 'thereby hangs a tale,'" said Mabel, bestowing an arch glance upon Isabel.

Under Isabel's skillful touch, the instrument sent forth sweet strains, which, borne upon the evening breeze, were wafted over the calm waters, and fell with touching beauty upon the ear of the lone man who still sat upon the trunk of the old tree, sheltered from sight by the foliage around him. Close beside him had the gay party stood when they entered the boat; for within the little cove formed by the bend in the river the *Water-Lily* was always moored. Quietly he had sat there, watching their movements; and once, when Isabel's white dress had fluttered almost within his grasp, his hand was raised to his brow, and he seemed with difficulty to repress a groan. And now, as the little boat with its precious freight went dancing gayly over the surface of the moonlit river, his dark eyes followed it with a look of eager intensity. "If I could—O, if I could but weather the storm for her sake!" he moaned. "It matters little to me now; for myself I care not; but for her, life is so bright and beautiful, and I, with my own hand, must dash its sweet hopes to the ground." And the head, with its gray locks, fell again upon his hand.

But soon the dark, restless eyes were again turned toward the water. The little boat had disappeared, and all was still. He arose and began, as before, to pace slowly to and fro; his hands now clasped behind him; his hat drawn low over his brow. "And there's Eugene, too," he murmured; "it will be so hard for him. Just on the verge of success, my hand must stop all—my voice call him back. And Henry, too—poor boy, poor boy! With such a proud spirit and uncurbed will! Ah, how will he submit to this? And little Nettie, the last little treasure added to our household gems! O, my brain, my brain—'t will drive me mad!" And with a quick, half-frenzied gesture, his hat was removed, and his hand, already hot and parched with fever, was pressed upon his aching brow.

"And how shall I tell Maria—how will she bear it?" continued he, passing his hand now through the gray locks, in a weary, despairing manner. "She, so used to every luxury—every pleasure that heart could desire? We are growing old too; life has less of the old fire and vigor of other days. Ah me! how true it is, 'Changes will, changes must, upon us come!'"

He paused, and looked again toward the river, and there, in the distance, appeared the *Water-Lily*; and soon upon his ear fell the notes of a

sweet, well-known song, one which Isabel was accustomed to sing for him in the evening at home. Nearer and nearer came the boat, closely watched by him who stood in the shadow of the trees. Suddenly he turned away, and walked rapidly in the opposite direction; he gained the rustic steps, ascended, and soon stood upon the cliff above. Pausing a moment, he turned and cast a last look toward the river. The little boat had passed into the cove, and the party stood upon the shore.

“My poor, unconscious Isabel!” muttered the watcher; “a few more hours, and all that remains for us of happiness will be but the memory of having once possessed it.” He strode away, and when the young folks reached the steps, he had disappeared. He did not slacken his pace till he reached his own gate. Passing through, he entered the lawn. How peaceful it seemed! The circuitous path leading to the entrance of the house gleamed out white and beautiful from amid the shrubbery by which it was bordered; the moon bathed all in her soft light, casting a halo of beauty over the large white house toward which he bent his steps. Upon the piazza, waiting for his coming, stood Mrs. Brasure. She was a woman advanced in years, yet still possessing traces of beauty and grace. She

was dressed in faultless taste, and in manner and address was very much like Isabel. She came down the steps to meet her husband, and in a playful manner put her hand through his arm, exclaiming: "Why, Arthur, what a truant you have become! It is utterly impossible for me to keep track of you lately. But where have you been so long? I've felt so lonely."

Making a strong effort to regain his self-control, Mr. Brasure said something about taking a stroll.

"Pretty well to go strolling round the country at this time of night, leaving me to amuse myself as best I can," said the lady, half in jest, half in earnest.

"I thought you had company, my dear."

"Only for a short time; a mere formal call of about eight or ten minutes' duration; and you stole out while I was engaged, you naughty man." And she looked up, with a playful smile, into her husband's face. Instantly a change passed over her own countenance. Something in his look startled her, and, with a little cry of fear, she stopped short.

"Arthur," exclaimed she, "something has happened! O, speak! tell me, where is Isabel?"

"With her friends, down at the cliff."

"And Eugene—you have bad news from him."

Tell me, Arthur ; keep nothing back !” And her clasp tightened on his arm, and her anxious face looked ghastly white, as the full rays of the moon fell upon it, raised beseechingly now to her husband.

“No, dear wife ; quiet those fears ; be at ease. Eugene is well and doing well, as far as I know. We have every reason to be proud of him.”

“Then what has occurred to distress you ? You are ill, and have kept it from me. Was this kind ? But come, you are ill, indeed,” continued she, as she felt his hot hand tremble in hers. She drew him toward the house, anxiously watching him as they went. To her eager inquiries he only answered quietly, “I am not well, Maria ; I need a little rest.” But his heart seemed to cry out, as he spoke, “But where shall rest be found ?” They entered the wide hall, and, throwing open the heavy oak door of the library, Mr. Brasure was soon reclining on the softly-cushioned lounge beside the deep bay-window, his anxious wife near him, inquiring what she could do to add to his comfort or pleasure.

“Nothing now, Maria ; I will just rest here awhile,” answered he ; and, not daring to trust himself to meet those tender eyes looking upon him with such wifely solicitude, he closed his

own, feigning sleep to avoid speaking. Quietly she sat there watching him, wondering why he had grown so sad and quiet of late, noting carefully the lines which seemed to have come over his face recently, and the careworn expression which had settled about the mouth and eyes, that ever before had seemed so frank and confiding.

Wondering greatly that she had not noticed it before, pondering in her heart the probable cause, she still sat there musing. "True," thought she, "I have thought him absent-minded at times, and less communicative than formerly, but did not think of any serious illness. He never complains, poor, dear Arthur. I shall watch more closely in future. There has been so much company in the house this season, and Isabel and I have spent a great deal of time in the city, too—and that reminds me of an engagement there next week. I would like to go, and had promised myself great pleasure, it is true; but I will not leave him; my place is here. He needs me, and Isabel shall go alone;" and, with tender devotion, she bent over him, and passed her soft hand caressingly through his hair. "Dear me, how strange!" thought she; "why, I didn't know he was growing so gray. Strange how quickly these silver threads appear when once old Time

begins his work upon them ! Why, it seems to me they have changed very, very suddenly. What can have caused it ? I 've heard of children bringing the gray heads of their parents with sorrow to the grave, but we have no such source of trouble ; our little flock are truly a blessing in every sense of the word. I do not understand it, I am sure. I feel so troubled, and can not tell why." And the lady sighed as she turned her eyes to the lawn, resounding now with the glad voices of Isabel and her friends.

They came in, and went at once to the pleasant drawing-room, where a short time was devoted to music, after which they separated, the hour being late. The final adieus over, Isabel stood upon the piazza alone, watching the moonbeams lying upon the garden-walks, lighting up every object so beautifully. She soon came to the library to say, "Good-night ;" and, comprehending at a glance that something was wrong, she was soon kneeling beside the couch, begging to know if "poor papa was really ill, or any thing had occurred." Mr. Brasure opened his eyes, drew her toward him, and assured her that he was not seriously ill, asked her if she had had a pleasant evening, and, having quieted her fears, kissed her good-night.

Somewhat reassured, yet with a vague feeling

of unrest and a dim foreboding of some coming event which was now casting its shadow before, Isabel ascended the broad, richly-carpeted stairs, and sought her own room. A very pleasant room, indeed, was that which she entered. Large and commodious, elegantly furnished, and boasting a profusion of ornaments and little knicknacks, which, though they may be called trifles in themselves, perhaps, yet, taken together, always impart an air of taste and refinement.

In a short time silence reigned throughout the house and grounds. The angel of repose brooded over all, bringing sweet rest upon his sheltering wings. Rest? Ay, to Isabel and the other members of the household, to whom had come no sorrow! But to Mr. Brasure came no rest. Through all the long hours of the night he planned and thought, and vainly strove to discover some means by which he might extricate himself from the ruin which threatened him, and involved the happiness of those nearest and dearest to him. This was to him the keenest of all his sorrows, so tenderly was every loved one enshrined in his heart.

Mrs. Brasure, feeling deeply every arrow which pierced that heart she knew was so truly devoted to them, could not rest. With woman's penetration, she readily divined that he was pass-

ing through no ordinary trial. She felt that the waves of a great sorrow were passing over him, and that he had long been concealing it from them. That he could no longer bear the burden alone, she was satisfied, and waited patiently for him to make her the sharer of his sorrows, as she had been of his joys.





CHAPTER II.



FEW years previous to the opening of our story, Mr. Brasure had stood upon the pinnacle of wealth and high social position, to which, from his very boyhood, he had aspired. To be a rich man, a man of note and influence, had been one of the chief aims of his life. That he possessed many noble traits of character, is true; that he was by nature kind and generous, had been proven by many an action; but the ruling power of his life, the one trait underlying and governing all others, had ever been *ambition*. When a boy at college, he had outstripped all in the race for knowledge; and in the days of early manhood he had entered upon the great field of active life with the determination of overcoming all its difficulties, and carving out for himself a name and a position among men. To him these words of the poet were full of deep, true feeling:

“In the world’s broad field of battle
In the bivouac of life,

Be not like dumb, driven cattle ;
Be a hero in the strife."

Fortune smiled upon his efforts, success crowned his labors, and in a few years, he, through his persevering energy and indomitable will, had attained that for which many have toiled a life-time, and was accordingly numbered with the wealthy, and looked upon as one of the most influential men of the city in which he resided.

While still quite young, he married one in every way worthy the love of a true, manly heart, and the new life seemed very fair to both as together they stood upon its threshold and looked out over the smooth, pleasant pathway which hope and youthful enthusiasm sketched in brilliant colors for them. No rugged places to be carefully smoothed down by watchful, loving hands in that onward journey ; no "Hill Difficulty" to climb, no "Slough of Despond," through which to grope their weary way. These, they fancied, had all been met and overcome, and now lay shrouded from sight in the dim distance, among "the things that were."

Mr. Brasure was one of those who think principally of the things of this life only, forgetting that which is to come, or, if mindful at times of the great hereafter, looking upon it as something with which the present had nothing to do—a some-

thing belonging exclusively to that period of life when old age creeps on, weakening the tenacity of the grasp with which earthly things are held, enfeebling both mind and body, and reminding, by tottering steps and dimmed eyes, that the grave lies but a few rods further on. For him life's greatest difficulty had consisted in gaining the summit upon which he now stood. It had indeed been a toilsome journey; for he was one of those who had wrought out his own path in life, having been dependent from boyhood upon himself. An orphan, alone and friendless, having conquered at last, what wonder that he looked back now complacently upon the past, feeling satisfied with himself for having accomplished so much, unaided and alone? What wonder if he looked forward with complacency, too, believing that the time had come when life would daily yield increase to his wealth, and enlarge his influence, thereby adding new luster to his name, rendering his position yet more enviable and secure?

Mrs. Brasure had been raised in affluence. An only child, accustomed to a life of ease and luxury, never brought into contact with its stern realities, her girlish days had passed like a pleasant dream. Life's sorrows were to her a myth—its pleasures and present joys the one topic with which she had become perfectly conversant. She

was an amiable, lovable woman, possessed of gentle, womanly ways, and a kind heart full of tender emotions, with a chord of deep sympathy lying dormant beneath the many more prominent traits which were oftener called into action. Had the nobler sentiments of her nature been aroused and improved, a fund of inexhaustible hidden treasures would have been revealed. Like her husband, she considered her future as already secured and looked forward to a long and happy life to be spent by his side. A devoted wife and mother, an ornament to the society in which she moved, every want of her heart seemed satisfied. What more could be desired? By her family, perhaps nothing; by her God, every thing!

Time passed on, and their home, where grandeur, taste, and beauty each held sway, became the loved asylum of a happy family. Eugene, the eldest, was a noble boy, one whose actions soon gave evidence of right principles within. At the time of his introduction to our readers, he had just completed his studies, and had started on an extended tour through the Old World, in company with two of his college friends. He had long looked forward to the trip with eager anticipations, feeling that it would prove one from which he should derive both pleasure and profit. Isabel had but just entered upon her seventeenth

year, and was at this time receiving instruction at home, from competent teachers. She was a light-hearted, fair-haired young girl, full of life and gayety. Scarcely can we apply the term beautiful to her, nor yet the simple word pretty, since that does not embody all that we would say. Hers was a face which invited study. All its charms were not apparent to a mere casual observer. The features were not strictly regular, nor the complexion faultless. Painters would not receive inspiration by a single glance of her eye, nor would poets sing of her silken tresses, since neither was beyond criticism. Yet it was a pleasant face to look upon—one which inspired confidence and trust, and prompted the close observer to desire her friendship and esteem. The eyes are said to be an index of the heart, and in Isabel's case the old saying seems to have been verified. The expression was so kind, loving, so like herself in all things. In manner, she still possessed the artless simplicity of a child. And now, having summed up all her graces, we are almost inclined to conclude that, after all, she possessed some claim to the title of beautiful.

Henry, the second son, a lad of about fourteen, was a bright, active boy, naturally quick and intelligent, yet possessed of a willful disposition and violent temper, both of which were frequently

manifested in the home circle to such a degree as to render him a source of sorrow and trouble to all. His parents frequently endeavored to check the growth of these unlovely traits, but met with little or no success. Mr. Brasure was too often absorbed wholly in his business affairs to bestow the time and watchful, judicious care upon him which such a disposition required. His wife, being a fond, indulgent mother—a trifle weak, perhaps—disliked what she called “a scene,” and preferred to yield a point rather than contest it. She was greatly inclined to give way to that feeling of motherly pride which prompted her to overlook his faults. He was such a lively, handsome boy, so brave and manly in his deportment, when he chose to be, that Mrs. Brasure excused his shortcomings by saying: “He will overcome them himself when a few more years have passed over his head. He is full of life, a little too wild and willful, perhaps; but he will make his mark in the world yet, and some day we may be as proud of him as of Eugene.” And last, but by no means least, in the estimation of her friends, comes the dark-eyed, rosy-cheeked household pet, Annetta. Seldom did she receive the benefit of her name, however; for each member of the family seemed to have bestowed upon her some appellation, according to his or her own fancy.

She was, in turn, "papa's delight," "mamma's darling," and "Isabel's pet." As for the cognomens bestowed upon her by her brothers, they were numerous, and not unfrequently ludicrous, according to the whim of the moment. She answered alike to the titles of Dolly, Toddle, Rose-bud, May-blossom, and others. A pretty sprightly creature, with sweet, winning ways, she bound all hearts to hers with strong cords of love which could not be resisted.

Mr. Brasure's ambition was of such a nature as to incite him ever onward. One object accomplished, another was at once undertaken. Had he lived in the days of Alexander, and been permitted to engage with him in the work of subjugation to which the conqueror applied himself, he would doubtless have been ready to weep with him, also, when there were no more worlds to conquer. Anxious to increase the wealth which he already possessed, he began to hazard large sums, with the hope of their ultimate return to him, vastly increased. He engaged in speculations, and, for a time, met with great success. Encouraged by this state of affairs, he invested still more largely, confidently expecting each investment to yield him immense profits. He was therefore amazed when the tide finally turned against him, and he was proclaimed the loser by

many thousands. Not willing to be driven from the field while yet there was time for successful retreat, he sought to regain that which he had lost by a still more hazardous scheme, and met with a loss more disastrous than the first. With a determination to overcome even defeat itself, he, with his characteristic boldness, renewed the attack, and, quite losing sight of prudence and caution, staked all upon one desperate venture, the final result of which was financial ruin.

The storm had long been gathering; clouds had gradually lowered and darkened around his home; but close within his own breast he had guarded the secret of his repeated failures, and the spirit of unrest took up its abode there, driving out before it all the sweet peace and comfort which had once reigned supreme. To his wife he revealed no word of his troubles, hoping to retrieve his fallen fortunes before she should discover how fearfully they were tottering upon their frail foundations; and why, thought he, should I needlessly distress her? But the crash had come, the die was cast, and nothing now was left but ruin, ruin!

Unable to meet the family with his usual pleasant manner, he wandered, as we have seen, to the quiet, lonely retreat beside the river, where he might give vent, unseen and unheard, to the

feelings pent within him. He beheld himself an old man now, less able than formerly to cope with life's difficulties, yet compelled more truly than ever before to look its stern realities fully in the face. Turn where he would, ruin, utter ruin, stared upon him! This new and formidable trial was indeed an overwhelming one, and the "Hill Difficulty," which stood out distinctly before him, looked barren, bleak, and high. He felt that the power to climb it had now deserted him, though once he would have dauntlessly scaled its heights, regardless of discouragements. Into the "Slough of Despond" he felt that he had already stepped, and was momentarily sinking deeper and deeper, with no friendly hand outstretched to save him. The steps which would have led him safely on were all unheeded now, while the "wicket-gate" was a thing too small, too humble, to be perceived by him.

To a man who has become immersed in his own pursuits to the exclusion of all else, there remains but little to which he can turn for comfort when the storms of trouble finally gather, beating with merciless force upon his unprotected head. He vainly longs for a shelter there which shall be to him like "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." To render the position of Mr. Brasure yet more hopeless and

embarrassing, he had used the means left to his wife by her father, having invested the entire sum with the same wild hope of gaining by this means treble the original amount. It was a bitter disappointment to awake and find that this also had drifted from his grasp. And now, how to reveal the true state of affairs to his wife, was to him a difficult problem. How could he tell her he had recklessly beggared the children who looked to him for protection and support? How could he ask her to share his poverty, as she had shared his wealth, she who had been kept aloof from trials of every kind? O, it was cruel, cruel! And yet it must be done. Many, many times were the words upon his lips; but as often did his courage fail, and they died away unspoken.

Ah, how often the poor, trembling heart of man shrinks back from the painful duties which throng about life's highway, and how loath it is to inflict suffering upon those who are treading daily the same path with them, sharing the same joys, and looking forward to the same future, which to them, in their unconsciousness of coming sorrow, still wears the same bright hues with which hope and desire clothed it long ago! To Mr. Brasure the task was especially hard, since he could not but feel that a portion, at least, of his

present troubles were of his own creating ; for had he not been reckless, imprudent, and blind ? He could not fail to perceive, now, that he had indeed been greatly at fault in thus allowing himself to be carried so far beyond the reach of all possible safety, cutting himself off from all hope of retreat before it was too late ; and now again and again did he ask himself the question, “ How could I have been so blind ? ”





CHAPTER III.

RIGHTLY the first rays of the morning sun shone into the pleasant breakfast-room of the Clifton Mansion, as the large palatial residence of Mr. Brasure was styled. The silver-service upon the well-spread table reflected his radiant touch, casting a similar brightness upon all surrounding objects. The flowers which bloomed in the deep bay-windows sent forth their richest fragrance, while the pet canary gayly sang his sweetest notes as he hopped from perch to perch, enjoying the sunshine with which his cage was flooded. Little Annetta's kitten was playfully frisking about the room, endeavoring to catch within her snow-white paws the audacious flies which so often troubled her repose when curled up on the rug for a quiet nap.

Mr. Brasure sat in his easy-chair, waiting for the family, who had been already summoned to breakfast. He sat, apparently engaged with his paper. But that the ordinary news of the day

possessed but little interest for him was evident. His eye wandered from place to place; he moved restlessly about, and his whole appearance was that of a man whose heart was disturbed by many conflicting emotions and mind ill at ease, yet endeavoring the while to keep all within bounds by assuming a cheerfulness which the poor, struggling heart was far from enjoying. He looked around the room, and sighed heavily as the thought, "No longer mine," forced itself upon him.

At this moment the door leading from the hall was opened, and Mrs. Brasure entered, with a languid step quite unnatural to her. With a look in which were strangely blended anxiety, trouble, and fears of, she knew not what, she approached her husband. He looked up, and attempted to smile in the old pleasant way; but what a failure it was! A look of pain crossed her face as she bent down, saying gently:

"Arthur, will you tell me now?"

The tones, so like a woman's when touched by love, pity, and strong desire to aid and cheer, fell upon the ear of the wretched man with a sweetness and power never before recognized in all the journey of life which they thus far had trodden together. Again, he looked upon the comforts and adornments of that pleasant room.

Again he thought of the luxury and ease which had surrounded her early life, before she had consented to share his own, and he thought: "And must I drag her down to a life of which she has no conception; doom her to sorrows and privations of which she has never dreamed; condemn her to bear trials which will weigh her to the very earth? O God, pity and help me now! How shall I speak the words which shall bring all this upon her?"

With a half-suppressed moan, he turned away; and again she pressed the question, urging her right to share any sorrow, however great, which might have fallen to his lot. How little he knew the mighty strength of a fond woman's love! How faint were his conceptions of her power of endurance!

"Tell me, Arthur; let me help you, if I can," she pleaded.

"Not now, Maria; another time will do as well," he answered, turning sadly away.

"And must I, in the mean time, stand idly by, and see you suffer, Arthur?" And the gentle voice trembled with emotion; the eyes grew dim, as they gazed through tears upon him; and her lips quivered like those of a grieved child.

"But, Maria," he urged, "you can not understand these business matters; they are intricate

and perplexing in all their details. You have never bestowed any thought upon these matters, and are wholly unused to it. And yet, Maria, I—”

But the conversation was suddenly interrupted ; for the door was again thrown open, and the nurse entered with the little Annetta. Very lovely she looked, this bright morning, fresh from her bath ; with the rosy hue of health upon her soft cheek ; the light of happiness and merriment beaming from her eyes ; her childish face all smiles and dimples, as she sprang toward her father, and began to climb, as was her custom, upon his knee. Enticing her kitten to a place beside her, she succeeded, by her freaks with her pet, and her innocent talk to him, in beguiling a smile to his care-worn face, forcing him to reply to her as she wished.

Isabel entered a moment later ; and soon Henry sauntered in ; and the circle being now complete, they gathered around the table. A feeling of unaccountable sadness and gloom seemed to pervade the circle. Conversation, usually so brisk and lively, appeared to flag. Topics were introduced, and dropped undiscussed. Mr. Brasure sat in silence. His wife watched him furtively, as she tried to follow up the slight clew he had given her, in his reference

to business matters. She knew so little of such things. It seemed now to be a subject quite beyond her reach. That he could have become a bankrupt seemed quite out of the question. Such a thought in regard to a man of his wealth was not to be entertained for a moment. Still, she pondered the theme, till she became as abstracted in manner as he. Isabel looked from one to the other in a bewildered way, and, after a few ineffectual attempts to draw them into conversation, relapsed into silence. Henry, with a boy's love of mischief, amused himself by teasing little May-blossom; a sport in which he indulged to his heart's content for once, since no one was so sufficiently attentive to his movements to reprove him for worrying the child.

"Mother," said Isabel, as they arose from the table, "I forgot to tell you yesterday that Madame Allison sent me word she needed several additional yards of lace, in order to finish my lilac silk handsomely; and asks a yard or two more of that rich black satin, for yours. Shall I send her word this morning, to purchase them herself?"

"Yes, dear; tell the madame to procure whatever is needed, and have the bill sent in with the others, so that all may be settled at once."

"And mother," continued Isabel, "Cousin Mabel told me last night that she and auntie are

going to the city with us next week to select new carpets and curtains for their drawing-room. Don't you think ours needs replenishing too? Those elegant lace curtains for sale at Gregg & Co.'s, throw ours quite into the shade."

"Why, Isabel, dear, it is only a short time since ours were put up, and I am sure they are very beautiful."

"Yes, mamma," replied the daughter, coaxingly; "but not half as showy as those Mabel says they intend having; they are perfect beauties!"

"Well, dear, we will see," replied Mrs. Brasure, absently. Her eyes met those of her husband as she spoke. Something in their expression startled her; and for the first time the idea that he really was in need of more ready money than he could command, began to assume definite shape in her mind.

"Possibly the rents have not been paid in promptly," thought she; "or he may have loaned a great deal, which has not been repaid; but that need not trouble him so greatly, I'm sure. How glad I am that, in case he does need money, I can help him. I shall have all that I possess placed at his disposal immediately." And intent upon carrying her little project into execution, she followed him from the room to mention it to

him at once. Before she reached him, however, a servant met him, and, handing him a card, informed him that a gentleman waited for him in the library.

He glanced at the card, and, passing into the room, closed the door carefully behind him, leaving Mrs. Brasure standing alone in the hall. He had not heard her light step as she approached, nor was he at all aware of her presence near him ; but her quick fear did not fail to catch the deep-drawn sigh which fell from his lips, as he entered the room where he was to meet the visitor. Again she thought with pleasure of her power to aid him, in case he was in need of assistance ; and, ascending the stairs, she went to her room, to wait till he was alone, and an opportunity thus be given for telling him of her plan.

An hour passed, and still they were closeted together. Once, she fancied her husband was pacing the floor, as was his custom when excited or disturbed. She thought she recognized the quick, impatient tread, habitual to him upon such occasions. The housekeeper came in just then for orders, and her mind was somewhat diverted for a time. Isabel, too, was chatting about a pleasure-party, to be gotten up for a trip a few miles up the river, to a little island, noted for the

beauty of its scenery and romantic situation. At last the outer door closed heavily, with a sound which rang through the house. Concluding the visitor had departed, Mrs. Brasure hurried through with her directions, in order to go down before her husband should leave the house.

Little Annetta threw aside the picture-book with which she had been amusing herself, and started as quickly as her little feet would carry her, to "kiss papa good-bye." Patter, patter, down the stairs, through the hall, they heard her going, calling, "Papa, papa, Rosebud's coming!" The lisping accents won no response; no strong, cheery voice was heard, answering as usual, "Here comes papa's delight!" Wondering at the want of the customary welcome, the child timidly pushed open the door, and went in.

A moment later, and Mrs. Brasure rushed down the stairs and through the hall, closely followed by both Isabel and the housekeeper; for from the study had the child's cries and sobs, and wild cries of "Mamma! mamma!" resounded suddenly upon their ears, causing each to spring up in alarm and hasten to learn the cause. They entered the room, and there, upon the floor, lay Mr. Brasure, wholly unconscious, a little stream of blood trickling from a wound on the head, which evidently had struck upon the edge of a

statuette which lay shattered near by. Annetta was upon her knees beside him, covering his pale face with kisses, and sobbing bitterly because he did not speak to her. He was carried to his room, and a physician speedily summoned, who, upon examination, pronounced it a fainting-fit, produced by strong mental pressure, which perfect rest and quiet would in a few days overcome.

But day after day passed by, and the prostrate man grew no better. No word of recognition of wife or children crossed his lips. Not even the pitiful coaxing of his little May-blossom could elicit a response. Quietly he lay there in his darkened room, wrapped in a heavy stupor, from which it was impossible to arouse him, while beside him the anxious watchers wept and prayed. There, too, did little Annetta take her place. Putting her tiny hand in his, she would stand by the hour on her little stool, patiently waiting for him to open his eyes and speak to her.

Very bitterly, now, did Mrs. Brasure regret that the secret of his great unhappiness had been withheld from her. Sadly she thought of the many hours he had undoubtedly spent in sorrows which she had not shared, nor even been permitted to lighten by her sympathy. Forgetting the present, she wandered far back to the glad time when she had stood by his side a happy

bride. She remembered the thrill of pleasure with which she first heard him say, "My wife." She traveled again, by memory's aid, all the steps which they had taken together, passed over all the paths of pleasure they had trodden in life; and ah, how many they were, how good God had been to them, how many blessings he had showered upon them! She came back now to the present again, and realized that, after a wedded life of so many years, the first cloud had fallen between them, the first breath of the coming storm. She felt this; for any trouble beneath which the strong, energetic man would sink must be one which would not pass them gently by; and she sat beside him now, shivering with unknown dread, longing to see him open those eyes with the old look of kindness and trust, and tell her it had been but a feverish dream.

Very silent and lone seemed the great house now, dark and dreary the unused rooms. The servants moved about with a muffled tread, speaking in whispers, glancing, in a sad, pitying manner, at each other, whenever any one of the once happy family appeared. The birds sang, undisturbed, by the river-side; the vines clung yet more closely around the rustic steps down the cliff; for those whose feet had so often passed up and down came not now to enjoy the shadowy

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coolness and quiet beauty of the beloved retreat. The little boat remained, day after day, fastened securely to her staple; for there were no pleasant excursions now upon the water. Her young mistress had forgotten her in her trouble; for the great sorrow which now overwhelmed her excluded all else from heart or mind. Her guitar lay mute in its box, its strings never swept by the skillful fingers that loved to awaken its sweet voice into strains of richest melody.

Even Rover, the great, shaggy dog, which for years had followed the master or the children wherever they went, now lay upon his mat, whining piteously, as if joining in the grief of those who had ever been so kind and gentle to him. He was unnoticed now, and missed the caresses he had been accustomed to receiving. A shadow like that of the grave had settled over Clifton Mansion and the grounds; for the master lay hovering between life and death!





CHAPTER IV.

“ELL, Eugene, whither shall we bend our steps to-day, and to what shall our attention be first directed?” and the speaker, a tall, noble-looking specimen of humanity, threw himself into a chair, which he immediately tilted back, in order to elevate his feet upon the back of another, placed in front of him for that express purpose, by which action he at once proclaimed himself an American.

“Well,” answered the person addressed, who was no other than our young friend, Eugene Brasure, “in answer to your first question, I believe the programme is not yet decided upon; and in regard to your second, I would say, let our attention be first directed to the good things with which the table yonder is groaning for our benefit.”

“True, that is the first thing to be considered. But where is Howard?”

“Coming! coming!” responded a cheerful voice from the hall, the owner of which soon made his

appearance, apologizing for being tardy; "for," said he, "yesterday's adventures quite tired me out, I must confess; but this delightful morning finds me refreshed and ready for another round of sight-seeing."

The trio now proceeded to do justice to the breakfast prepared for them. How well they succeeded, we will leave for the waiters to testify. In order to understand the scene just recorded, we must ask our readers to go with us to the city of London, which place Eugene Brasure and his friends had reached some days before. Having already visited many places of interest, they now debated, over their breakfast at the hotel, as to what should claim their attention during the remainder of their sojourn in London. It was finally decided that the party should take a look, first, at the famous St. Paul's Cathedral; and accordingly, in the gayest of spirits, they turned their steps in that direction immediately after breakfast. Arriving at the principal entrance, they ascended the flight of steps leading to the portico above, with its twelve lofty pillars, which, together with the colossal figure of St. Paul, excited their warmest admiration. Entering the edifice, each was impressed with the size and grandeur of the place. The long range of columns and immense piers, the loftiness of the

vaulting, and the many monuments of sculpture, all added their interest to the place.

From St. Paul's they proceeded to the Thames Tunnel, through which they walked, thinking, with singular sensations, of the ships sailing over their heads. The Colosseum in Regent's Park and the Zoölogical Gardens next claimed their attention. An inspection of such a collection of animals from all parts of the known world occupied some hours. The National Gallery of Painting and Sculpture claimed its share of attention too; for Eugene was an ardent admirer of all works of art. On Sunday, they visited Westminster Abbey, attending the morning service with feelings of mingled pleasure and interest. The afternoon was spent among the tombs, reading the various inscriptions, and musing upon the life and character of many an illustrious sleeper beneath.

The following day was devoted to the curiosities found in the British Museum; "for," said they, "such a vast collection of antiquities can not be examined with any kind of satisfaction in less time, since here are treasures of science and art which may well be ranked among the wonders of the world." The Houses of Parliament also received attention. The grand front of the buildings, with their beautiful displays of

carvings, decorations, and elaborate designs, was greatly admired. Upon the interior they gazed with surprise and admiration. The carved roofs, the spacious senate-halls, the statues of sovereigns and statesmen, fresco paintings and throne of the sovereign, each was for them an object abounding in interest. A view of Crystal Palace could not be dispensed with, and accordingly, one bright morning, they started for Sydenham.

Entering the world-renowned building, they were surrounded at once with objects on every hand calculated to awaken curiosity and captivate both mind and fancy. The day passed all too quickly away, and our tourists wished that several additional hours might have been added to its length. But as it was growing late, they took a stroll through the Sydenham Gardens, admiring the statues, fountains, curved walks, and general appearance; after which, they returned by railway to London again.

Next upon the programme came Scotland; for our young travelers desired to include in their route the land of Scott, Wallace, and Burns. Accordingly, we find them next reconnoitering the old town of Newcastle. To Eugene it presented rather a dull, gloomy appearance, which may be partially accounted for by the stormy condition of the weather upon the

day of their arrival. Clouds, darkness, and rain do not aid in showing off any place to good advantage, especially such an one as Newcastle; for the houses, many of them really handsome buildings, are blackened by the smoke ever issuing from the coal factories for which the place is noted. From this point, they proceeded to Edinburgh, and looked with pleasure upon the attractions of which the city boasts; among which, was the monument raised to the memory of Sir Walter Scott. Stepping on board a train bound for Melrose, they were soon gazing upon Melrose Abbey.

Other places of interest were visited in turn, each bringing to mind some little incident or romance of which this romantic land has been the scene. The Scottish scenery with which they were at times surrounded, repaid them for the trip, and they returned well satisfied to Edinburgh. A hasty trip was made to Stirling Castle and Loch Lomond; after which, they proceeded to Glasgow, returning at last to London by way of Carlisle, taking in upon the route Lancaster, Sheffield, Derbyshire, and other places, upon all of which our friends bestowed more or less attention, arriving at last once more in London.

It had been the intention of our party to proceed at once to France, going with as little delay

as possible to Paris first, since that was the great center of attraction. Its superb and beautiful collections of art, both ancient and modern; its salubrious climate; palaces, cathedral, and boulevards,—all conspired to act as a mighty magnet, drawing our young friends hither. Eugene longed to gaze for himself upon the Cathedral of Notre Dame, the Hotel des Invalides, the Triumphant Arch, Palace of Luxembourg, and the Tuileries, with all other places of which he had so often heard and longed to behold.

Upon arriving in London again, however, letters were found awaiting them, which had the effect of changing the course marked out. Learning that a party of friends were now in Germany, with whom they desired to travel, they at once decided to join them, proceeding afterward to Paris in their company. As the party in question were at the time in Hamburg, our tourists took passage across the North Sea, and were soon upon the waters of the beautiful River Elbe. They were deeply interested, and often amused, at the many scenes spread out before them, and certainly found no opportunity for complaints of monotony. The river was alive with crafts of all sizes, kinds, and characters. Upon one hand might be seen large Government vessels; yonder the merchantman; here and there a yacht,

bedecked with flags; interspersed now and then with pleasure-boats, which looked like tiny shells when compared with the great steamers near by. Pretty villages and landscapes, captivating to those who, like Eugene, have an eye for the beautiful, were passed in turn; and, after a delightful trip of some seventy miles, our party arrived at the city of Hamburg. Their first care was to find the friends whom they wished to meet. This was soon accomplished, as the letters had named the hotel at which they were staying; and here, too, Eugene and his companions took up their abode for a few days.

For Eugene the quaint old city abounded with interest. An inspection of its many noble buildings afforded him great pleasure. From the top of St. Michael he enjoyed a magnificent view of the picturesque city and its suburbs. He found particular enjoyment in strolling through the walks bordered by grand old trees, especially that portion near the Alster Basin, a kind of artificial lake, abounding with pleasure-boats filled with gay pleasure-seekers, all enjoying the strains of charming music, which the band discoursed on pleasant evenings. The ramparts which surrounded the city also possessed attractions for him, so beautifully were they laid out in rare shrubbery and fragrant flowers, with

winding walks, all carefully tended by competent gardeners. This spot always reminded Eugene of home and the beautiful garden there which he so dearly loved to picture now before him, through the aid of faithful memory.

Their sojourn in Hamburg being ended, they proposed now to take up the line of march again for new and other scenes awaiting their attention. One evening, quite weary with the adventures of the day, they sought rest at an early hour, in order to be in readiness for a new start the following morning. Eugene's slumbers that night were broken and unrefreshing. Thoughts of home filled heart and mind, and in fancy he visited every spot about the dear old place. His father's voice seemed sounding upon his ear, and his mother's smile rose plainly before him. Isabel's ringing laugh seemed resounding from the cliff to the sloping bank below. Henry's cordial grasp was felt anew, while dear little Annetta's clinging arms appeared to be ever about his neck. Rousing from this half-waking dream for a moment, he slept again, and the scene of his travels arrayed themselves before him. One moment he appeared to be gazing upon the crown jewels in the Tower of London, and the next, on the point of throwing himself from London Bridge into the waters beneath. Not until the bright sun was

streaming into his room, illuming and beautifying all with magical touch, did he sink into deep slumber.

His companions, wondering at his delay in joining them at breakfast, at length found it necessary to arouse him, lest the hour for their departure should pass before their preparations were completed. Laughingly they chided him for indulging in protracted dreams upon such an occasion. In the midst of their preparations for departure, a letter was handed to Eugene.

"O!" exclaimed he, "a letter from home; how fortunate!" And, with a quick, eager movement, he broke the seal, while his companions softly sang that sweet old song:

"Good news from home, good news for me,
Has come across the deep blue sea."

Eugene read a few sentences, then, turning pale, sank into the nearest chair, while his friends, feeling the inappropriateness of the song upon their lips, paused abruptly, watching him in silence as he read on. The package contained two letters, one from his father's lawyer, setting forth the true condition of his father's business affairs, containing, also, news of his illness, and advising his immediate return. The other was from his grief-stricken mother. It contained but a few lines, evidently written with a trembling

hand. She implored him to come to her, begging him to hasten, if he would see his father alive. Half stunned by the unexpected shock, Eugene sat like one bewildered, the open letters lying at his feet, having dropped unheeded from his relaxed grasp. A glass of water, a few words of earnest sympathy and kind offers of assistance from his friends, recalled his wandering senses, and in a short time he was able to explain to them that he must retrace his steps and take passage for home as speedily as possible. Knowing and appreciating Eugene's strong affection for his parents, they understood and respected the feelings which now overwhelmed him, and at once took the necessary steps for a speedy return, relieving Eugene from all care and anxiety upon the subject.

With as little delay as possible the preparations were completed, and our party "homeward bound;" for such was the attachment existing between Eugene and his two long-trying friends, that they refused to leave him, though he entreated them to continue their travels without him, assuring them that it would trouble him greatly to feel that his own summons home should be the means of bringing their trip to a sudden termination. Nothing, however, could induce them to proceed without his company.

They assured him that the prospective journey had lost its attractions for them, and expressed their own desire to see the father of their friend while he still lived.

Long and tedious seemed that homeward journey to Eugene ; wearily passed the hours he so impatiently counted ; and, when at last fairly launched upon the broad Atlantic, night after night was spent in weary vigils upon the deck. The close confinement of his little room seemed to stifle him. A feeling of unrest took possession of him, and upon the deck alone could he find even a semblance of peace. Like his father, excitement of any kind prompted action. He could not remain quiet ; but, like him, paced to and fro, until a looker-on would wonder that tired nature did not give way.

With a feeling of intense relief, he heard the cry of land. With a prayer of thankfulness, he stepped on shore at last, his heart burdened by conflicting emotions of hope and fear. With all his attainments in knowledge, Eugene had not neglected that which is above and beyond all else. He had learned to trust in Him who "doeth all things well ;" and now, with a silent, fervent prayer for those he loved, together with a plea for strength from above, he turned from the confusing scenes around him, and, mingling

with the passengers who had disembarked, he proceeded upon his way.

Upon every hand friends were meeting with friends. Joyous greetings were exchanged all around him. Here and there a solitary passenger left the steamer and proceeded on alone like himself. But such instances were few; and soon he, too, felt the cordial grasp of a friendly hand; for upon the pier he was met by Mr. Reed, the lawyer, from whom he had received the intelligence which brought him home. Knowing that Eugene would take passage upon the first steamer homeward bound, he had hastened to the pier to be the first to greet him upon his return, and to impart to him the latest news concerning his father.

Eugene was gratified beyond the power of expression to learn that death still stood aloof, and even seemed about to release from his grasp the victim he had so nearly claimed as his own; and again within his heart arose a feeling of gratitude to Him who had been so merciful and kind, and, with that earnestness so characteristic of him, he exclaimed, "Help me, O my God, to render all praise and thankfulness to thee!" Without pausing to rest, though urged by Mr. Reed to do so, he proceeded at once on his journey, having a distance of eight or ten miles yet to

travel before he should be indeed at home with those he was so anxious to see again. Alone and sad, yet striving to call up within his heart a feeling of hopefulness and cheer, he passed over the lonely road intervening between the city and Clifton Place. At last the desired haven was reached, and he turned from the main road into the old, well-worn private carriage-way leading to the house, which soon appeared in sight. At the time of his arrival, the place was wrapped in darkness; for it was midnight. From the window of his father's room, however, he soon perceived a faint light shining forth, which seemed like a ray of hope to the weary, worn traveler.

Not wishing to disturb any who might be slumbering within, he dismounted at the gate. Fastening his horse to a tree, at some distance from the house, he quietly walked up the gravelled path, debating within himself as to the best method of gaining admission. Finally concluding to awaken the gardener, he turned toward the rear of the house, when, to his surprise, the front door was noiselessly opened, and Isabel ran lightly down the steps to meet him. Very precious to him was this sweet welcome home, from the sister he so truly loved. Every night, for nearly a week, had she watched and waited and listened for his coming, though repeatedly assured

that he could not possibly arrive so soon, considering the distance; and now, as he stood there, holding her in a close embrace, she felt repaid for the vigils she had kept, even though they had been useless until now. A few whispered words concerning the improvement of their father, with tidings of all the rest of the household band, and then, with a calmer heart than he had known for weeks, he followed Isabel into the house. She led him to the dining-room first, insisting upon his taking some refreshment after his journey, and assuring him it would be best to defer seeing the invalid till morning, as he was now sleeping quietly.

But a few moments had passed, when Eugene started suddenly from his seat. His quick ear had caught the sound of a well-known step upon the stairs, and, in an ecstasy of delight, he sprang forward to meet his mother. The voice of her boy, low and guarded though it was, had roused her from the light slumber into which she had fallen while reclining upon the lounge, where, night after night, she took her place, ready to respond, at any moment, to a call from the invalid. She looked weary and dispirited, and much older than when Eugene had left her, but six months before. He was shocked at the change in her appearance, while she, in turn, was grieved

to see her bright boy look so worn and troubled. He had traveled so continually, allowing himself so little rest, that nature had resented it by drawing great dark lines about the heavy eyes, stealing from his cheek its hue of robust health, and robbing the step of its buoyancy. Isabel sought to comfort and cheer them both, and ended by insisting that they should at once bid each other good-night, and seek a little rest, at least, before morning should again be ushered in. Her advice was taken at last. An affectionate good-night was exchanged, and Mrs. Brasure returned to her room and took her place upon the lounge, having first ascertained that her husband was still asleep. An uneasy feeling of dread arose in her heart as she did so; for the hands of her patient seemed so hot and dry, and upon his cheek the signs of burning fever appeared; yet he seemed quiet, and she hoped it would pass, and the morning find him better. She could not sleep again, but lay there, watching him with anxious eyes.


Eugene went to his own room, which had been made ready for his coming, brightened and beautified by the flowers he loved, gathered and placed there by the thoughtful Isabel, assisted by Annetta, who fancied that her little hands were aiding vastly in the work of "making

all pretty for brother." Utterly worn out, he was soon sleeping soundly; for a feeling of comparative rest had come over him since his return. The burden of anxiety and suspense had been partially removed now; and, after once again commending them all to the watchful care of Him who never sleeps nor ceases to care for his children, he sank into a deep, refreshing sleep. No feverish dreams assailed him now; no tormenting fears aroused him into weary wakefulness. Calmly as an infant in its mother's arms, he slept, watched, we doubt not, by the angels that we are told minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation. Isabel, too, repaired to her pleasant room, and soon Clifton Place was dark and silent again. Would that it might have so remained till the morning's sun should rouse all nature into renewed life and activity!





CHAPTER V.

N the following morning, Eugene arose early; and, before any of the family were astir, he had visited all his favorite haunts, remaining longest at the chosen retreat beside the river. He seated himself at the foot of a grand old tree, and looked sadly out over the waters, flowing so calmly and beautifully onward, ever onward! As he looked, a steamer appeared in sight, large and powerful. She presented a noble appearance as, like a creature of life, she plowed her way through the water. Here and there a little skiff appeared directly in her path, but in a moment was rowed hastily aside, leaving for her a clear, free passage. She passed on, and the water, which had previously flowed so calmly and gently onward, now came surging in foam-crested waves to the shore, breaking upon its rocky surface, sending its scattered drops in tiny sprays hither and yon. But soon the vessel disappeared from sight, the disturbed waters gradually regained their quietude.



EUGENE AT THE RIVER.

tude, the waves surged more slowly, subsiding ere they reached the shore. The little skiffs again sought the current, and the same quiet beauty pervaded the scene as when Eugene first beheld it that morning.

"How much does such a scene remind one of life!" thought he. "How often, over its calmness and prosperity, comes some great—perhaps unforeseen—event, which, sweeping all before it, sends the great waves of sorrow surging madly over the heart, disturbing its peace, destroying its rest! The little cares and perplexities incident to every-day life fade into nothingness before the one trial which, in its onward course, overwhelms and overturns all else. The trial, once bravely met and overcome, however, will eventually pass on like yonder vessel; and the heart, if supported and sustained by the grace of an ever-watchful, loving Father, will regain its peace. Yes," continued Eugene, "God never sends an angel to afflict a soul, but another follows in its footsteps to cheer and to bless." Sitting there alone, he, too, reviewed the past. He thought how prosperity, wealth, and honor had ever followed his father, how complete and unbroken had been the family circle, and how strong and enduring every link in the strong chain of love which bound their hearts together.

“God has been good to us,” said he. “Every step in life has been marked by some special care and act of loving kindness.” He felt that he indeed might echo the words, “His loving kindness, O how great!” “And now,” continued he, “what are we, that we should murmur, if, over the smooth current of our life, an opposing element should come? Will he not help us to bear it? Will he not give us strength to conquer at last, though we see our dearest hopes shattered and broken like the spray, which, seen for a moment, rises and falls, and finally is lost amid the waves which receive it? And yet how weak and unstable is poor human nature! How prone we are to stumble and fall with the first adverse wind which passes over us! But,” continued he, rising and pacing slowly to and fro, “to moralize is one thing; to act is another. Neither will answer alone. My part is to combine both. Let me but understand these matters as they really are; let me but set them clearly before me, understanding the nature of each difficulty; then I am ready to do any thing, every thing in my power, toward restoring to its calmness this life of ours, which seems so sadly ruffled now. My dear father’s health shall be my first consideration; then the condition of his business affairs must be closely investigated and

fully understood. Possibly, upon close examination, they will prove to be in a less deplorable state than has been supposed. Much will depend upon me now. O, may God help me to discharge every duty faithfully, and to be a blessing to my afflicted parents! In all that I do, may I be directed and guided by power from on high!" And there, at the foot of the old tree, with the birds singing over his head and the rippling waters making sweet music at his feet, Eugene kneeled in earnest prayer to God, imploring for himself wisdom to act, strength to overcome; and for those he loved, power to endure, though the heart suffers keenly while it murmurs, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." For his father he asked renewed health; or, if that be not the will of his Creator, then a humble submission to even this dispensation of Divine providence.

Strengthened and comforted, he arose and turned his steps in the direction of home. As he reached the cliff and turned into the path leading to the house, his eyes bent, in deep thought, upon the ground, a sweet, childish voice called his name. Looking up, he saw a little, white-robed figure hastening down the path to meet him. "My darling!" exclaimed he, extending both arms toward the child. With a cry of

joy, she sprang forward. He caught her, and pressed her closely to his great, loving heart, while the little arms wound themselves around his neck, and the rosy mouth was held temptingly up for a brother's kiss. Pushing back the hair which clustered in soft curls around her brow, he looked smilingly into the dark eyes, gazing now into his with an expression of delight at seeing him again.

"How beautiful the picture," said Isabel, as, from the piazza, she caught a view of the touching scene.

"So glad, so glad, dear, dear brother!" cried the child, between her kisses, with a look of such perfect joy that Eugene could not repress a sigh as he thought of the future.

"O, would that her life might be ever as bright and unclouded as at this moment!" he murmured. "Every act of mine shall strive to make it so. All that a brother can be, I will be to them both," he added, as his eye caught sight of Isabel, waiting for them,

"You are looking pale this morning, dear sister," said he, as, with Annetta still in his arms, he joined her on the piazza. "How is father?"

"Not so well," answered she. "He was very ill and restless all night."

"And you had no rest, then, after you sent me to my room?"

"Very little, Eugene?"

"Were you with him the remainder of the night, Isabel?"

"Yes!"

"And mother, too?"

"Yes, Eugene; we could not leave him a moment. There are times when he requires all our care."

"Why did you not let me share that care, Isabel? My place should have been beside you during all the hours you spent watching there. Why did you not call me?"

"It would not have been best, Eugene. You are worn out already. Your homeward journey tells upon you still," said she, noticing the dark lines about his eyes.

"And you are weary, too, Isabel; and our mother—it grieves me sadly to find her so changed."

"We are all changed, dear brother; and our poor father more than all," exclaimed Isabel, bursting suddenly into tears; and, leaning for support against the vine-covered pillar, she sobbed bitterly, as if her tears, long pent up within her own breast, had burst their bounds at last, and refused to be held longer in subjection.

Eugene turned pale. With a feeling of dread struggling within him, he tried to soothe into comparative calmness her poor tried heart. Suddenly a tear dropped upon his forehead; and, looking up at the child in his arms, to his great surprise he saw that the look of brightness and joy which had so delighted him but a moment ago, had vanished. The rosy lips were quivering now, a grieved expression had settled over the sweet young face, and the large dark eyes were looking through tears into his.

"O, this is hard!" cried he. "Hard, indeed, to see every trace of brightness fade from the face of one so young." Well did he know, now, that the heart was already growing older than her years should warrant. Sad was it to realize that over her had come, thus early, a knowledge of life's miseries. Silently they stood till each had regained some degree of composure, then turned to enter the house.

"Can I see father now, Isabel?" asked he.

"Not yet," she answered. "Be patient for a little while," she added, trying to smile through her tears.

"Does he not know that I have come, Isabel? Has he expressed no desire to see me yet?" questioned Eugene.

Isabel's eyes dropped beneath his gaze, and the tears threatened to flow again, freely as before.

"He has not asked for you this morning," said she, evasively.

"Papa don't understand," whispered Annetta, bending her little mouth close to his ear.

Eugene looked up with a bewildered expression, as, in a tone of surprise, he said: "Why, pet, brother don't understand now; what is it you mean?"

"Why, when papa is very, very sick, you know, sometimes he don't know any body, not even mamma; and this morning he didn't speak to his little Nettie at all." And a look of unutterable sadness crept into her eyes as she spoke, and the quivering lips gave token of the pain which the circumstance had given to her affectionate heart.

Eugene passed his hand caressingly over the little head which had dropped upon his shoulder. He turned again to his elder sister, saying: "Isabel, tell me, truly and freely, is there no hope for our father? Is he in danger? I thought he was improving, and looked forward to a glad meeting with him this morning. Will he not recognize his returning son?"

She did not answer, but, turning to Annetta, said: "Nettie, darling, see if mamma needs me now."

Eugene released her; and, with a quick, noiseless step, she ascended the stairs. As she dis-

appeared from the landing above, Isabel passed into the library, motioning Eugene to follow her. Closing the door, she seated herself upon a low ottoman, and covered her face with her hands, remaining for some moments as if wholly oblivious to her surroundings. Eugene sank into a chair near by. Oppressed by a dread of, he knew not what, he waited in silence for his sister to speak.

“Eugene,” said she, in a low voice, at last, “mother desired me to tell you; for she can not, poor mamma!” The voice quivered and broke down, her head dropped upon her hands again, and low sobs surged up from her burdened heart. Eugene left his seat, and, hastily crossing the room, sat down beside her. Drawing her head to his shoulder, he smoothed back the hair from her white forehead gently, as a mother would soothe a weary child. In a short time she recovered herself, and in a trembling voice said: “Eugene, I have a hard task before me. Forgive my weakness; but it is a difficult thing to tell you that we fear our dear father may never again recognize any of us. It is hard, indeed, to say to you that it is possible he may never speak a word of welcome to his returning son, whom he has so long and so sadly missed.”

With terrible force did the blow fall upon the

heart of Eugene. He sat like one suddenly bereft of the power of speech or motion. So silent was he, that Isabel, thoroughly alarmed, disengaged herself from his clasp, and looked in terror upon his pale face. She arose, and sprang in haste toward the door to call for help, fearing he would fall; but, with an effort, he motioned her to return. It was long before he was able to conquer his emotion sufficiently to ask for, and receive, a full account of his father's condition. Isabel told him then how he had gradually changed from the pleasant, communicative, ever-cheerful husband and father to the silent, restless, and not unfrequently impatient man; how he had often been detained for days together in the city with business cares; and how he wandered alone about the grounds for hours when at home. She related how his lawyer had come, one morning, in great haste to the house, and how they found their father in a fainting fit after his departure.

"He was ill a long time with brain-fever," said she, "and we did not know, at first, where to send for you. Your last letter was delayed, and we only knew you had left England; but for what point we could not tell. By the time we learned your whereabouts, we feared poor papa's days were numbered. But soon after, he

rallied again, reason returned, and he grew rapidly better. He learned, then, that we were looking for you, and seemed to long constantly for you. We counted the days, even hours, so anxious were we for your coming. Even in his sleep, poor papa would call 'Eugene;' and the moment he awoke the first question was: 'Has he come? Will he not be here soon?' 'Eugene, my son,' seemed ever in his heart and on his lips. The day before you came, Mr. Reed was here and assured him he might safely look for you within two days. After that, he became very restless, and his mind wandered at times. Just at dark, last night, he asked again if Eugene had come, saying he thought he heard the well-known voice. Soon after, he wandered again, and talked of ruin and beggary most pitifully; but afterward grew calm, and said, 'Surely, Eugene will come to-morrow.' We told him we were quite sure of it. He smiled as if satisfied, and at midnight fell asleep. We were in hopes he would rest quietly, and be able to rejoice with us this morning over your return. But O, Eugene, such a night! It was terrible." And poor Isabel shivered, as if in the midst of fearful peril. In a moment, she went on in an unnatural, despairing tone, which fell like a funeral-knell upon the heart of her listener.

“Soon after you went to your room, mother came hurriedly to me, and bade me rouse Henry and send him with all speed for the doctor. Trembling, I obeyed; and when I had seen him started on the errand, I joined mamma in her watch. Papa did not know us. Reason seemed quite gone, and he raved so violently at times we could scarcely restrain him from leaping from his bed. Several times we feared we would be under the necessity of calling you to our assistance; but dreaded to do so, for you were so unprepared to see our father in such a state. Doctor Grey soon came, and remained till daylight. As papa was sleeping from exhaustion then, he left, promising to return in a few hours, bringing with him a consulting physician. He has been awake since, but only looks at us with a vacant stare, not even noticing little Nettie—poor darling—and that almost breaks her heart. It has been one of her greatest pleasures to sit on the bed and talk to him, when he felt better; or to stand on her little stool beside him, waiting patiently for him to notice her. He seemed to love to have her near him, and missed her the moment she left her position. She has given up all her playthings, pictures, books—in short, every thing, even her rambles about the place—for the sake of interesting papa. In action, she seems to

have become like a child of twelve, at least. She notices every thing concerning papa so quickly, that I sent her away, just now, not wishing her to hear all that I have told you, knowing so well how the recital would call into action all the sympathetic emotions of her tender heart. It grieves our mother to see the child lose the freshness and vivacity so natural to her; and yet, after all, no one is so changed as poor mamma herself." And a heavy, long-drawn sigh followed the sentence, as her mother's pale, anxious face, with its weary, despairing expression, her languid step and attenuated form, came vividly before her.

Deeply did Eugene regret that he had not arrived a few days sooner, while his father longed for his presence. "O," said he, "how precious a welcoming word from him would have been!"

"Yes, dear brother, I know it; and yet, since you traveled with all possible speed, do not reproach yourself for one moment. It could not have been otherwise. Let us now hope for the best, yet be prepared for the worst."

"Has Doctor Grey expressed any decided opinion as to the cause of this illness?" asked Eugene.

"Yes," was the reply. "He says it is the result of long-protracted mental suffering, in consequence of heavy losses in business. Lawyer Reed has already told us that his business affairs

are in a bad condition. But what is that, compared with the one great loss we are almost daily dreading now?"

"True: nothing can equal that. But, Isabel, I must see him."

"Wait here till I speak to mamma. She wanted you to know this before you went to his room." And Isabel passed out into the hall, and went up to the chamber of illness and grief.

Mrs. Brasure sat at the head of the bed, gazing, with a look of despair, upon the face of her husband. That night of more than usual suffering had left its mark upon them both. Annetta stood upon a stool beside the bed, waiting for him to wake up and speak to her.

"Mamma," she whispered, "see! Isn't he waking now? Do help me up. I know he will want me there." And the child was lifted to her accustomed place upon the side of the bed.

Isabel came quietly in, and approached her mother, saying, as she bent over her:

"Mamma, may Eugene come now? I have told him."

Mrs. Brasure raised her head, and looked anxiously at her daughter.

"My poor boy!" said she. "How does he bear it?"

"Nobly," said Isabel.

"My own brave Eugene! Thank God I have such an arm still to lean upon! Let him come up, Isabel. But have you told him to expect this change?" and she pointed to the thin hand and pallid face of the beloved invalid.

"Yes, I have told him all; but O, mamma, it was such a task, my strength almost failed me! Only the thought of yourself enabled me to go through with it. Indeed, it was a struggle even then."

"I know it, my daughter. But it is over now; and Eugene's bravery and nobleness of heart and mind will help to strengthen us, I am sure. But let him come now, Isabel."

A few words to Eugene, in the library, of additional preparation, and then she led him up to look upon the face of the father, who, but a few days before, had yearned so unceasingly for the presence of his son. His mother met him at the door, a look of intense anxiety upon her face.

"My poor boy," said she, "this is a sad coming home for you. Would that it might have been a happier one!"

"God has willed it so, dear mother," said he, gently. "Let us not rebel. He will help us to bear it, if we will but trust him."

With tearful eyes, she looked at him, wondering at his strength, while she was so weak and

helpless. With a noiseless step, he crossed the room, and stood beside his father. They had told him he was changed; but such a change as this, Eugene was not prepared to see. It required all the fortitude he could summon, to bear it as bravely as he wished, for the sake of those who depended now upon him alone for strength and comfort. It was pitiful to see the man, once so strong and robust, lying helpless as a child, weak, emaciated, and pallid; but far more pitiful was it to meet the vacant gaze of the sunken eyes which opened upon him as he stood there. Mastering his own feelings, Eugene sought, by every means in his power, to awaken within those orbs some sign of intelligence; but in vain. No expression of recognition crossed his features; and soon he turned away and slept again.

During the morning, Dr. Grey came in, accompanied by another physician. After a careful review of the case, and lengthy consultation in an adjoining room, each gave it as his opinion that Mr. Brasure would never fully recover. He might rally for a time; but the strength and vigor of both mind and body were hopelessly gone; and his final release from suffering would, in all probability, be but a question of time.

A bitter hour was that to the afflicted family. Mrs. Brasure and Isabel wept in each other's

arms. Henry buried his face in his hands, and sat motionless; while Eugene, clasping the sobbing Annetta in a close embrace, kneeled in that chamber of gloom, and prayed that God, in his infinite goodness and mercy, would comfort them in this trying sorrow.

In a few days, Mr. Reed, the lawyer, came, and was closeted several hours with Eugene. The day following, Eugene went to the city, where the entire day was spent among his father's books and papers. In the evening, he returned home, and watched all night beside his father, going to the city again early the next morning. This was kept up day after day, his mother and sister wondering greatly at his remarkable power of endurance, sighing sadly when he would not take time to rest. So anxious was he that nothing should be left undone for the promotion of his father's health, and nothing omitted in his efforts to save a remnant, at least, of the fortune he had once possessed, that to no other hands would he delegate the tasks he had taken upon himself.

At times there were signs of improvement in the invalid. He would rally, occasionally, for a short time, and speak naturally. Sometimes it would be but a word or two, often only a call upon a familiar name, and a smile of recognition

when the delighted hearer stood beside him. Little Annetta still sat upon the bed, or stood by it, on her stool, waiting and watching, beside herself with joy if he but held out his hand and murmured, "Papa's delight," or "My little Nettie." Several times he called for Eugene, when he was in the city; but by the time he came home he was either sleeping or unconscious of his presence. This was a sore trial to Eugene, who longed for a word or glance of recognition; and thus far the coveted boon had been denied him. Upon learning, one evening, that his father had asked for him several times during the day, he decided to remain at home the day following, hoping that he would again be able to speak, if he was near him; but he was doomed to disappointment. His father was feverish, restless, and in an unsettled state of mind all day, noticing no one around him. The next day, a note from Mr. Reed summoned him again to the city, on business of importance; and, with a heavy heart, he left home, yearning continually to hear his father's voice. After a day of care, perplexity, and trials innumerable, it seemed, he again reached home, quite late in the evening. Annetta met him at the gate.

"Why, Rosebud," said he, "what brings you here? It is late, and the dew is falling."

"I know, I know," answered she; "but O, brother, I wanted you to come, O so bad; and I came way down here just to see if I couldn't see you coming over the hill there."

Eugene stooped down, and, gently raising the light figure, placed her on the horse before him, holding her with one hand and the reins in the other. With eyes shining with a look of joy, she looked up at him, smiling.

"You are the bearer of good news, darling, I am sure," said Eugene. "What is it? I am eager to know. And tell me, too, why you were so anxious for me to come?"

"O!" cried she, clasping her hands in delight, "papa is better, and keeps asking for you. Mamma told him you would come in a few moments; and he begged her not to let him go to sleep again till he had seen you. I knew you wanted him to know you, brother; for I saw you cry, yesterday, when he did not answer you at all. And, indeed, I wanted to help you, and tell you may be he would speak to you to-day; but I couldn't, because, you see, it made me cry too."

Ah! the sympathetic chord in that tender heart! How it vibrated to every touch of sorrow! How keenly it felt for another's woes, and how it longed to comfort and cheer! Eugene

pressed her to his strong, loving heart, and silently thanked God for such a treasure, invoking upon her the blessings of Heaven. A few moments later, and they reached the house. With Annetta's hand in his, he went at once to his father's room.

"That dear, thoughtful child has been to meet him, and hurry him here with all speed," said Isabel to her mother, as she saw them ascending the stairs.

At last Eugene had the happiness of hearing his father speak his name. A smile of happiness, at seeing him, spread over his pale face as the words "Eugene, my dear son," fell from his lips. He was very weak, however, and conversation wearied him; and after a little while he fell asleep. Eugene watched beside him, and several times heard him call his name, and saw him smile as he answered the summons. Once he pressed his hand, and looked longingly at each member of the household band, as if commending them to his care.





CHAPTER VI.

“**G**OOD morning, Mr. Reed. What’s your hurry?” called out a pompous-looking gentleman, one morning, as Mr. Reed was hurrying down Broadway in the direction of his office. The gentleman addressed paused as his questioner stepped before him, extending the thumb and index-finger of his right-hand. “What’s your hurry?” repeated he.

“An engagement at ten,” answered the lawyer.

“How is business?” asked his companion.

“Brisk,” was the laconic reply.

“Then I congratulate you, for you are certainly very fortunate. Every body else is crying dull times, dull times, till I am tired of the endless repetition.”

“Then why repeat it yourself?”

“Why, having been forced to hear the cry so often, I don’t know but that I have become a kind of an echo myself, taking up the cry as others send it forth, repeating ever after them, dull times, dull times. But it was not for this

I stopped you, Reed. There's a question I want to ask you."

"Pray, then, be brief," replied the lawyer, restraining with an effort a movement of impatience.

"They tell me," continued the gentleman, "that Brasure's place is going to be sold; and as you have acted heretofore as his lawyer, I suppose you are well posted in his affairs, as a matter of course."

"Very likely," returned Mr. Reed.

"And as I am looking about for a country-seat, I thought it possible that the place might suit me passably well. 'Most too far from the city, though; which is a very decided objection."

"Then why think of purchasing?" asked the lawyer.

"Why, you see, sir, we can't be suited in every thing, you know; and as it is situated at such a distance from the city as to render it rather inconvenient for business, you must understand at once my motives."

"Not at all, sir; I am quite in the dark."

"Why, really, Reed, I thought you would see through it at once; you are usually so keen. To be plain, then: as I said before, it is not conveniently located, and will, therefore, not be likely to be sought after. Purchasers being few,

the place must be sold at a sacrifice, don't you see?" And the man chuckled as if keenly relishing his own scheme.

"No: I don't see at all," was the unsatisfactory reply.

"Then what a blockhead you must have become!" cried the man, testily.

"That does not of necessity follow," quietly said Mr. Reed.

"Why, Reed, what has come over you?" exclaimed the man, with an impatient gesture. "They say the place must be sold; and, of course, such being the case, no one knows it better than yourself. Now, if there are no purchasers, what then?"

"If there be no purchasers, then, as a natural consequence, there can be no sale."

"Botheration! Can't you be made to understand at all? Now, see here, Reed; you are well aware that old Brasure's affairs are in a tangled condition. He is utterly incapable of attending to business; and you know as well, perhaps better, than I, that he can not hold Clifton Place. Though you see fit to assume a very non-committal attitude, it's an easy matter to guess how matters stand. And, as I said before, the location is such that it must go cheap; and, in that case, I shall, in all probability, become the pur-

chaser. At all events, my wife and I will drive out this afternoon, and take a survey of the house and grounds."

"I beg, Mr. Monroe, that you will do no such thing," exclaimed the lawyer, with an interest such as he had not before manifested.

"And why, may I ask?" replied Mr. Monroe, drawing himself up to his full height, with an air of offended dignity.

"Simply because the place has not yet been publicly offered for sale, and the family are still there," answered the lawyer, in a tone which, of itself, seemed to say, "and that is reason enough."

"Come, now, that's rich," said Mr. Monroe, shrugging his shoulders and laughing derisively. "Why, man alive! if the place has not been publicly offered for sale, so much the better for all concerned. I shall just take it quietly off their hands at my own price, possibly; at all events, get it cheap, and, at the same time, save them the publicity of a sale, and——"

"Indeed, Mr. Monroe, it appears to me that would be taking an unfair advantage."

"Nonsense, Mr. Reed. It's nothing in the world but a business transaction."

"Then it might be classed with the transactions of those who are said to cheat each other, and call it business."

“Not at all. There’s no cheating about it. I merely offer a price, you see. They being anxious to get the place off their hands (and if they are not, they ought to be, to pay their debts), and purchasers being few, they naturally accept terms, and the thing is done. Where, now, is the unfair advantage? And as for the family being still there, why, the sooner they turn their backs upon it the better, say I; for they have no right to it now. The money it would bring belongs, rightfully, to Brasure’s creditors. Of course, if I go out and buy the place, I would not expect to turn them out of doors. A reasonable time would be allowed them to get away in all order and decency, to be sure. So you can’t help seeing, now, that both your objections have fallen to the ground.”

With a look of ill-concealed contempt, Mr. Reed replied: “You do not understand me, Mr. Monroe; and we have as yet no right to meddle with the affairs of the family. The time for the sale of the house has not yet arrived; and, although Mr. Brasure is not yet able to attend to business, owing to his long illness, his son has returned from Europe, and has taken the entire management of affairs into his own hands.”

A look of surprise spread itself over the face of Mr. Monroe at this announcement.

"Well," said he, "if he is no more capable of attending to business than Henry Brasure, I wouldn't give much for his management."

"Henry is but a boy, wholly unused to any responsibility. Eugene is fully capable of attending to the business, and is at present engaged in settling his father's affairs."

"Settling his affairs! Grand settlement, I've no doubt. Right glad am I that I'm not numbered among his creditors."

"So am I; sincerely so."

"Ah! You admit, then, that matters are as bad as they have been represented?"

"I admit nothing!"

"Hum! You are retreating within your shell again, I see. But one word before you go," cried he, catching at Mr. Reed's coat-sleeve, as that individual prepared to beat a hasty retreat down Broadway again.

"Well, what next?" cried the lawyer, in a sort of desperation, knowing that in his office sat Eugene, waiting for him all this time.

"I would like to ask your real reasons for objecting to a mere inspection of the premises."

"They have been already given, sir. As I said before, the family are still there, and the inspection, as you term it, would be an unwarrantable intrusion."

"I don't see it in that light," replied Mr. Monroe. "They know they are obliged to sell out and quit the place. And I, for my part, don't see any use in people putting on any such unnecessary airs, especially when they have to come down to nothing at last, as they are bound to do before long." So saying, he strode haughtily away, leaving Mr. Reed to swallow his disgust, and resume his way.

Reaching the office, he found Eugene waiting for him, according to appointment. An investigation of his father's business affairs had proved that but a small portion of the once immense fortune would be left to him after the final settlement. That the dear old home must be sold was true, indeed. And with a heavy heart Eugene set about making arrangements for the future. In company with Mr. Reed, he drove out that pleasant afternoon to look at a small place in the suburbs of the city, wishing to have the family settled in a new home previous to offering Clifton Place for sale, in order to spare them the sorrow of seeing the dear old homestead overrun by the people who would flock to the place, some actuated by a desire to purchase, others by idle curiosity. Mr. Brasure's health had improved to such a degree that he was now able to go about the house at will. His mind,

however, was shattered, and there was no sure foundation upon which to build a hope of its ever regaining the vigor of other days. He was weak in body still, easily fatigued, incapable of any exertion, and utterly unable to fix his thoughts upon one subject for any length of time. He was passive and quiet, often remaining for hours without bestowing the slightest attention upon any thing passing around him. At times a kind of stupor came over him, from which it was impossible to arouse him.

Little Annetta was at all times his chosen companion. Putting her hand in his, she would draw him out into the garden on pleasant days, and try, by every art of which she was capable, to interest and please him. She would entice him to a seat in some beautiful spot, and gather flowers for him, and talk unceasingly, perfectly happy if she but succeeded in bringing a smile to his pale lips, or, better than all, if she won from him a caress. At times he would draw her to him and smooth her hair gently, speaking softly and lovingly as she looked up in his face, too happy to speak. Then, again, all her little arts passed unnoticed, and her words or deeds, no matter how kind or how often repeated, won no response. She would then seat herself at his feet, and watch him anxiously, waiting very

patiently, still in hopes he would notice her by and by. Sometimes, finding all her efforts useless, she would go away for a while, and cry softly to herself; when, having relieved her burdened heart in secret, she would bathe her eyes carefully, and smooth her hair, lest he might happen to observe that she had wept over his indifference, and feel grieved himself. Effacing all traces of her grief, she would soon return to him, and renew her efforts to draw him from the stupor which so distressed her. Mrs. Brasure would often press the dear child to her heart and commend her for this devotion to her father, and then turn away and weep bitterly at the thought of the blight which had come upon her fresh, young life, sapping thus early the fountains from whence should flow sweet, gushing rivers of gladness and joy.

In all their afflictions, Godfrey and Mabel Moorely had remained stanch friends; and it had been arranged that Mr. and Mrs. Brasure, with Annetta, who would not consent to a separation from "poor, dear papa," should go to their home for a season, until a new one should be made ready for their reception. Eugene feared that the confusion and bustle attendant upon a removal might prove injurious to him, in his present weak state. When told by Godfrey that

his mother greatly desired a visit from him, he quietly acquiesced, and, without a word of inquiry or hesitation, entered the carriage with his wife, Annetta, and nephew, Godfrey Moorely. He appeared wholly indifferent to the ill-concealed emotions of Mrs. Brasure and Godfrey. Annetta sat beside him, and talked, in her sweet way, pointing out all the places of interest which they passed, winning, now and then, a gentle response. To Mrs. Brasure, the ride was a painful one. Home had been given up. The beautiful place over which she had presided so long as mistress must pass now into other hands. She had taken leave of all that was dear to her there, and felt that she had turned her back upon it forever. Dropping her veil, she wept long and silently, while he who would once have felt grieved over her slightest distress, now sat by unmoved. Godfrey watched her, with feelings of deepest sympathy, longing to comfort her, yet knowing so well how fruitless are such attempts at a time like this, and how empty and vapid seem the words intended to convey consolation. Annetta left her seat, and crept up to her mother's side. Putting her arms about her neck, she kissed her softly, whispering, "Poor mamma!" Mrs. Brasure held her closely, breathing a silent blessing upon the child, ever so

attentive to the wants and sorrows of others. She tried to appear more cheerful for her sake, and at once threw back her veil; and, smothering back the sorrow that still threatened to vent itself in tears, she talked to Annetta, and succeeded in banishing the look of grief which, for the moment, had overshadowed that fair young face.

In seeking to cheer the child, she soon discovered her own burden had been lightened, and could not but think how truthful that saying which tells us that, in seeking to bless others, we draw a blessing upon ourselves; but it was, at best, a dreary journey, and Godfrey, at least, was glad when it was ended. They drove up to a large, square-looking building, rather old-fashioned, yet very comfortable and pleasant within, boasting of more elegance and beauty within than would be guessed by a mere exterior view. Mrs. Moorely—who, by the way, was Mr. Brasure's only sister—met them at the door, ready to extend a cordial welcome to them all. Mabel, too, was there, and very assiduous in her attentions to their guests. For a time, Mr. Brasure seemed roused from his usual indifference, and manifested a greater degree of interest in his surroundings than at any time since his illness. Mrs. Brasure felt encouraged, and even hoped

that change of scene might indeed prove beneficial. Annetta, too, grew quite sprightly again, so rejoiced was she in her father's improvement. Eugene, Henry, and Isabel had been left, according to their own urgent request, to arrange all the details in regard to disposing of the old house and arranging matters for the new, their mother promising acquiescence in all their plans, feeling confidence in Eugene's ability to arrange all for the best. Mr. Reed had promised his assistance, and the entire matter was thus left in their hands.

The place near the city, to which Eugene and Mr. Reed had driven out on the day of the latter's encounter with Mr. Monroe, had been taken, and all that now remained was to put it in order for the reception of their parents. They went bravely to work. Such portions of furniture as it was their intention to retain, were transported hither, and arranged as tastefully as possible. One of the pleasantest rooms was arranged for a study; for, though Mr. Brasure had but little use for one now, still it was Eugene's desire that the new home should bear some resemblance, at least, to that from which they were now parting. Every article, therefore, belonging to it was retained; and the new study was fitted up in as nearly the same style as possible, the books and

pictures being arranged just as they knew their father had formerly desired them at home. How poor Isabel struggled through all this, she scarcely knew. At times she toiled on like one in a dream, and again would seem so overcome as to be unable to proceed. Arousing herself from this state of feeling, she would strive to go on with her difficult tasks, bearing the burdens of each succeeding day with a brave spirit. Eugene would not allow himself to give way to despondency. His cheerfulness and brotherly kindness to Isabel aided her greatly in mastering her own feelings, which so often threatened to yield to the trials that had gathered about her path.

Henry was not disposed to submit readily to the great change in their circumstances. To him their fallen fortunes was a source of constant annoyance and chagrin, which was manifested by complaints, fault-findings, and fretfulness. He made but little effort to assist Eugene and Isabel in their arduous undertaking, sitting idly by, remarking, every now and then, that every thing looked so small and mean he had no heart to work. In vain they tried to infuse into him, by both words and example, a portion of their own brave spirits. He refused to listen, and murmured continually over the hardness of their lot,

grieving them sincerely, and bringing upon himself the just censure of their kind friend, Mr. Reed.

At last all was complete, and the morning came when they were to bid a last adieu to the home which had been so dear to them. Every spot had its own associations, and each was now visited for the last time. Long did they linger by the river-side, listening sadly to the low murmurings of the stream. The long-neglected pleasure-boat still rocked gently to and fro; and Isabel's tears flowed freely as she thought of the many happy evenings she had spent upon the water in company with her father, who, after a day spent amid the busy turmoil of the city, would return in the evening, call cheerily for Isabel; then, taking Nettie in his arms, would hasten, with springing step, to the river, and, putting them carefully in the little boat, would guide them out into the stream, enjoying the rest and pleasure which it afforded him.

It was all over now; and Clifton Place had passed into the possession of another. Mr. Monroe was not the purchaser, however, since neither Eugene nor Mr. Reed had accorded him any opportunity for carrying out his pet project of "inspecting the premises." The location had proved no detriment whatever, nor had any diffi-

culty been experienced in effecting a sale. The present owner was an English gentleman of wealth and position, who, respecting the feelings of attachment which the family entertained for their home, cordially invited them to come often, kindly assuring them that he would never consider their presence at Clifton Place as an intrusion.

The Summer which had been marked by so many stirring events had at last passed away, giving place to the dreary days of Autumn. The leaves were dropping from the trees, and, with a low, rustling sound, like a faint sigh of sadness, fell to the ground beneath. The wind went wailing through the dismantled branches, while the sky above presented that dull, leaden appearance peculiar to the days which have been so fitly termed "the saddest of the year." Our friends were now established in their new home, which, while it made no pretensions to elegance, was still very comfortable and pleasant. Upon his first arrival at the place, Mr. Brasure looked around with some show of interest. He asked no questions, however, and at times seemed restless, anxious, and uneasy, wandering about with a look that seemed to say he was ever searching for something which he could not find. Eugene and Isabel noticed, with feelings of satisfaction,

that he appeared to feel more at home in the study they had fitted up for him than in any other part of the house. Surrounded here by the same objects to which he had for years been accustomed, he seemed to lose the restlessness which troubled him when separated from that with which he had grown familiar.

Mrs. Brasure tried to feel contented. She knew her children were constantly making every effort to render their new home as cheerful and homelike as possible, and she did not fail to appreciate all that they had done. A feeling of motherly pride arose in her heart, mingled with an earnest desire to feel satisfied with her lot. But every thing was new and strange, and so entirely different from that to which she, through all her life, had been accustomed. What wonder, then, that her present home seemed plain and cramped? Like Henry, she felt she had no heart to work. But she did not increase the unhappiness of others by giving vent to the feelings which oppressed her. On the contrary, she concealed them nobly, lest any despondency on her part should throw a gloom over the household.

Annetta appeared lost and bewildered. She could not understand why there was no river and boats to look at, and why the carriage and pretty match-horses never came to take them

out riding any more. She thought it very strange, indeed, that they should stay in such a place instead of their own beautiful home. The limited dimensions of the garden annoyed her exceedingly. In the home to which she was so strongly attached, there was so much beauty and grandeur, and, far as the eye could reach on every side, the grounds were laid out with taste and tended with the utmost care; while here, on the contrary, the garden was small, and had been sadly neglected. Eugene's attempts at improvement had, as yet, met with but poor success, since much time would be required to convert such a neglected waste into "a thing of beauty." On the first morning of her arrival, Annetta gazed in wonder from the windows for some time; then, turning away, begged to be taken home. Her father's voice roused her just then, and she hastened to answer his call; and, being with him in the study the greater part of the time after that, she gradually lost her longing for the old, well-known place, and in time became quite reconciled to the new.



ANNETTA AT THE WINDOW.

Face page 94.



CHAPTER VII.

WE must now pass over a period of several years, during which time no change worthy of note had taken place in the Brasure family. Matters had gone on in much the usual way. Indeed, every day seemed to pass very much like its predecessor, and life at times appeared very monotonous and dreary. One evening, at the close of a cold December day, Mr. Reed sat alone in his office. The fire had burned low, and now gave evidence of speedily becoming but a heap of ashes. He still sat before it, gazing into its dying embers with an air of abstraction, wholly unmindful of the increasing chilliness of the room. The wind blew more and more drearily, the atmosphere grew colder, and the darkness momentarily increased. The sign at his door creaked dismally upon its hinges, swaying madly to and fro, as if about to be precipitated to the ground below. The large apartment was uncarpeted, and seemed rather bare and comfortless, even gloomy, by the

dull light of the expiring fire ; and yet it was not altogether comfortless. An easy chair, a lounge well cushioned, and a book-case well filled, gave evidence of some regard being given to personal ease and comfort. The usual confusion and disregard for appearances, common to offices of all descriptions, was apparent here, as elsewhere. The dusty table was piled up with books and newspapers, among which lay bundles of papers, and documents of various characters, carefully tied with tape. In one corner stood a broom, which evidently was seldom called into action ; while in the nook just beyond the book-case stood at least three pairs of boots, in various stages of repair ; flanked on one side by the inevitable boot-jack ; on the other, by a pile of dusty law-books. The wooden mantel-piece was strewn with articles quite too numerous to mention, among which a shaving apparatus and hair-brush seemed most prominent. On one side of the unswept hearth stood a rough box, filled with coal ; and, beside it, a blacking-brush, with its attendant box of French polish, was seen.

The sudden ringing of the door-bell aroused the lawyer from the reverie in which he had so long indulged. Rising hastily from his seat, he glanced at the clock, and left the room to answer the summons himself. He opened the door ; and,

to his great surprise, Isabel Brasure stood before him.

"Miss Brasure!" exclaimed he, in a tone of astonishment.

"Yes, Mr. Reed, it is I," answered Isabel, throwing back her veil, revealing traces of a recent flow of tears from the dark, expressive eyes, which were raised timidly to his. "May I come in?" she asked.

"Certainly, certainly, Miss Isabel. Pardon the lack of invitation on my part. I was so surprised to see you out, on such an unpleasant evening, that I quite lost sight of my politeness," exclaimed the lawyer, leading the way to his office.

Isabel followed, silently. Throwing open the door, Mr. Reed paused at the threshold, in evident embarrassment. The disorder which reigned throughout the apartment struck him, just then, in a most unfavorable light; and the thought crossed his mind that it was really a very untidy place in which to receive a lady visitor. It certainly looks much more forlorn than usual, thought he, as, with many apologies, he brought forth an easy-chair, and begged Isabel to be seated, while he turned his attention toward coaxing into more genial warmth the expiring fire. After a few well-directed efforts, a

ruddy blaze flamed up; and soon Isabel's chilled hands and feet were restored to comparative comfort. Wondering greatly what could have influenced her to come to him at such a time, he bustled about a few moments, intent upon making her comfortable.

"For," said he, "I'm sure you must be very cold, and tired too."

A moment's silence ensued. Isabel sat, with downcast eyes, while Mr. Reed watched her fur-tively, waiting for her to introduce the object of her call.

"You are surprised to see me here this evening," she said, at last. "I came late, because I could find no other opportunity to-day for seeing you; and I felt that I must see you at once. You have been a friend to us in the past, Mr. Reed. We have appreciated the kindness you have shown us since our troubles came upon us; and I do not know where to seek for advice and counsel, save from you."

"Indeed, Miss Isabel," he replied, "I am always happy to be of any service whatever to you. In days long since departed forever, your father was a true friend to me. I owe him a debt of gratitude I can never repay; and if, at any time, I can aid you, by word or deed, you have but to command me."

"You are very kind, and from my heart I thank you," replied Isabel, thinking over to herself the words he had spoken in regard to her father. Any tribute of praise to him was very precious to her now.

"Yes," continued the lawyer, speaking as if she had not interrupted that tribute of praise, "any service I can render the children of my kind friend will be willingly, yes, gladly, performed; and if you are in any trouble, Miss Isabel, from which I can afford any aid whatever in extricating you, I beg you will let me know it."

He spoke warmly, his kind heart already yearning to lift the burden beneath which he clearly saw she was staggering. His words and earnest sympathy infused new courage into her heart; and, looking timidly up, she said, in a low voice,

"I came, Mr. Reed, to consult you upon two very important matters, both of which are sources of pain and trouble to me. First, I want to speak of Henry. It is hard for a sister to enter complaints to any one of a brother; and I have hesitated long before doing so, but have at last been driven to even this."

She paused, as if to gather strength and courage to go on; and after a moment's silence, upon which Mr. Reed did not think it best to intrude, she resumed her recital, in a sad, pitiful tone.

“You already know enough of his disposition, Mr. Reed, to be well aware that he has long been an object of great anxiety to us all. He is now a strong, robust boy of nineteen, able to do much to lighten the heavy cares and responsibilities with which Eugene is burdened; and yet, strange to say, he is idle from morning till night, wandering about in a listless, indolent way, which troubles our poor mother continually. I have begged and entreated that he would make some effort to become more useful, for his own sake, as well as for others; but all to no purpose. He complains bitterly, still, of our father’s misfortunes, and can not be brought to see that he might repair them, in a measure, if he would but try. He has no ambition to make the attempt, and becomes quite ill-natured whenever the subject is mentioned. I am at a loss to know what course to pursue in regard to it; for it is evident that matters can not long continue as they are. Our little income is not sufficient for our wants. It is dwindling away; and we are daily becoming more dependent upon Eugene, who exerts himself to the utmost to supply every need. Poor Eugene! O, it grieves me to the heart to see how nobly he toils, day after day, for us! All the bright dreams of his youth have been given up; and he is devoting himself to a life of self-

sacrifice, for the sake of those who cling to him for both support and comfort. Henry must be brought to see the necessity of exerting himself in some way. His boyhood days are over now; and he really needs employment of some kind, with which to occupy his mind. I am sure he would be less unhappy himself, besides relieving our minds of much anxiety concerning him. The question now is, how can it be done?"

Mr. Reed had listened attentively to Isabel's recital, and now sat a few moments in thoughtful silence.

"You say you have set the matter plainly before him?" said he, at last.

"Yes, frequently. I have pleaded with him in behalf of our poor father, and mother too, who seems to be daily growing more fragile and ill. I have even spoken of Annetta too, who may some day be obliged to look to him for protection."

"And he did not receive it kindly?"

"No: quite the contrary. In fact, such conversations irritate him to such a degree that I have no courage to refer to it again. I thought it possible you might have some influence over him, which you would willingly exert in our behalf."

Mr. Reed shook his head, as if to imply a doubt of success.

"Well," said he, "at all events, we can try.

Something must certainly be done. But has Eugene ever spoken to him about it?"

"Yes: but Henry would not listen. Only this morning, Eugene requested him to go with him to the office, and assist him, for an hour or two, in assorting over some papers. Henry muttered something about the stupidity of the thing, and immediately left the house, and has not returned since."

Mr. Reed gave all the encouragement he could, and promised all the aid he might be able to give; agreeing, also, to consult with Eugene in regard to it, on the following day.

"And now," said he, "what is the other subject you wish to speak of? Don't hesitate to tell me freely. I prefer that you should be frank and candid, always regarding me in the light of your father's friend, to whom you can freely bring your troubles."

"My doing so now, proves the confidence I have in you," replied Isabel; "and the subject is one which concerns myself. As I said before, it grieves me beyond expression to see Eugene struggling so manfully for us. I can not bear to see him so burdened with daily cares, and am anxious to share them with him."

"A desire which does you credit, Miss Isabel. But how can it be done?"

“‘Where there is a will, there is a way.’ Mr. Reed, can I not prove the truth of that saying?”

“I have no doubt of your entire willingness to do so; but you have never been accustomed to bearing a part in the world’s great field of labor.”

“Nor had Eugene any experience of that nature, before our father’s misfortunes; and yet see how bravely he went to work, and how persistently he has battled, day after day, with all the trials which have beset him! He is strong in spirit, persevering, and determined. And why can I not imitate these traits, even though I am but a weak, timid girl? A few years, at most, will overcome such difficulties; and God will help me,” she added, softly; for Eugene’s faith and noble example had not been without its effect upon her. She was daily learning to look to the same unfailing source for comfort and help. “God’s promises are sure and steadfast,” continued she, “and he has promised to help those who put their trust in him; and I shall have the satisfaction, too, of knowing I tried to assist Eugene.”

“You are right, Miss Isabel,” replied the lawyer, earnestly; “and I am glad to see that you are so courageous as to be willing to step forth from the seclusion of your present life into a more active one, for the sake of those around

you. But have you considered the cost? Have you thought of the sacrifice of ease and personal comfort which such a course must necessarily involve?"

"Ease and personal comfort!" echoed Isabel. "Ah, Mr. Reed, they were foresworn long ago!"

The tone, more than the words, convinced Mr. Reed that Isabel was thoroughly in earnest; and he felt assured that whatever she undertook would not fail of success for want of energy or will.

"She is like her father," thought he. "She has the same determination and persevering spirit which characterized him in his younger days. Eugene, too, has inherited the same traits."

Isabel sat, watching him, waiting for his opinion, and for some word of encouragement too; for she had great confidence in the lawyer's judgment.

"Have you any definite plans, Miss Isabel? Is there any special work for which you feel qualified?" asked he, at last.

"I think I could give instructions in Music and Painting," she answered.

"You are quite proficient, I believe, in both."

"I have a natural love for both, and applied myself assiduously, while receiving instructions in them, with the hope of perfecting myself, as

far as possible, for the sake of the pleasure which I derived from them, and to gratify my friends also. I little thought, at the time, I should ever make such use of the knowledge as I now propose to do."

"It is well that you did so; and believe me, my young friend, I commend your course, and wish you all possible success. Not that I give you good wishes only," he added, with a smile; "for I too often have occasion to prove of how little value they really are, when taken alone. I shall take pleasure in assisting you, as far as I am able, and will use all the influence I have, among my friends and acquaintances, in procuring pupils for you."

"I thank you, O, far more than words can express, not only for the aid you so kindly promise, but for the encouragement you have given me!" exclaimed Isabel, warmly.

"Indeed, Miss Isabel," replied he, "it is one of my greatest pleasures always to lend a helping hand to those who try to help themselves. Cheer up! We shall soon have a class with which to begin. But, by the way, now I think of it, there are a few obstacles still obstructing your path, some of which I am not sure can be easily removed."

"And what are they, Mr. Reed. I have

weighed the matter as carefully as possible; but I am young and inexperienced, and probably short-sighted. I shall be glad to receive advice."

"Well, Miss Isabel, pardon me if I give you pain; but are you aware that the gay circle in which you have moved, will not be likely to look upon the teacher in quite the same light as they regarded the heiress?"

"I understand you, Mr. Reed, and am prepared for any trials of that nature which I may be called upon to endure. I am strong enough to bear it, I assure you."

"I hope so; and am glad to know that you have, in a measure, prepared yourself for it. But your strength has not been tested, and you have no experience in such matters. Society is greatly at fault in these particulars; and I fear you will often meet with cool indifference now from many who have heretofore professed the warmest friendship, and, perhaps, even shared the hospitalities of Clifton Place."

"Such friendships, Mr. Reed, are of little value. I can afford to lose them," exclaimed Isabel.

Mr. Reed smiled, as, with a look of approbation, he replied: "I am rejoiced to learn that society has not spoiled you with her hollow professions and meaningless flatteries. Not that I would ignore the genuine good feeling which

does exist among some; for I am glad to be able to say that, in this matter, the old saying regarding exceptions to all rules holds good; but I only want to prepare you for some changes which I feared you would not expect, and possibly lack courage to meet. But your good sense and natural independence will enable you to pass safely through all these minor troubles. If you look upon them in the right light, they are but trifles, after all. But there is another difficulty in your way, Miss Isabel—one which I scarcely know how we will dispose of."

"Possibly it may not appear so formidable when we consider it well," said Isabel.

"Then I will be frank and candid. Do you know that you will be obliged to be absent from home the greater part of the time? Your father needs almost constant care, and your mother is in feeble health. I do not wish to alarm you; but I do think she looks seriously ill, though she complains so little. Now, are you quite sure that you are called upon to enter into this new work? Are you not, after all, overlooking the first and highest duty of your life? They have the first claim upon you. How will your place be supplied to them?"

"I am not surprised at your question, Mr. Reed," replied Isabel. "Were my place not al-

ready supplied to them, I should not, for a moment, have thought of seeking a field of labor elsewhere."

"I do not understand you. To whom have you resigned the care?" asked the lawyer, with a puzzled look.

"I did not resign it. It has been gradually wrested from me, till I find myself quite supplanted," replied Isabel, smiling at his look of incredulity.

"You seem to be in earnest," said he; "but you speak in riddles; and, indeed, you must also solve them."

"In a word, then, my sister Annetta is my successor. I wonder you did not at once think of her."

"Annetta! You astonish me. Why, she is but a child."

"A child in years; but in thought and action she is quite a woman already."

"And yet it seems but yesterday I held her on my knee, and repeated stories for her amusement. How time passes!" said Mr. Reed, thoughtfully.

"The time for such childish things soon passed away for her, poor child. We tried to keep her cheerful and gay and childish; but we could not. It is true, she is cheerful still; but it is of a different nature. We tried to prevent her from

taking upon her young shoulders so much care; but she could not be held back. Papa liked to have her with him. He never seems easy when she is not there. She noticed it, and began to consider it her duty to be ready, at all times, to minister to all his wants. If I attempted to relieve her, she became as anxious and uneasy as papa himself; and we finally concluded to leave them together, since it made them both more contented. Gradually she took our mother under her charge also, running here and there to obey her slightest desire. She frequently reads to her, while papa sits by, apparently interested too. This has gone on so long now, and the dear child seems so unhappy when she is not of use to our dear parents, that we have gradually yielded to her in these respects until she seems to have assumed charge of the whole. So well does she perform all these duties, that I feel I can safely leave her to her chosen work, and seek for myself that which can be made to benefit us all."

Mr. Reed had listened with surprise and interest to this account of the labor of love into which Annetta had entered with so much devotion.

"I knew," said he, "that Annetta was a remarkably quick child, but had no idea she had become quite such a little woman. But how

about her education? What are you doing for her in that line?"

"Our thoughtful brother, Eugene, has taken entire charge of her education. She learns remarkably quick; and, aside from her love of books, her desire to please Eugene has always been a great incentive to exertion. He spends all his evenings in the study with her."

"What a noble young man!" exclaimed Mr. Reed. "Indeed, there are few who can compare favorably with your brother, Miss Isabel."

A look of pride and sisterly affection beamed from her eyes as she replied: "You are right, Mr. Reed; and you do not know how it rejoices me to feel that I shall soon be able to share with him the work of providing for the dear ones at home, whom it will be our sweetest pleasure to make comfortable and happy. And you will see Henry, won't you?" she added, as she rose to go.

"Yes; I will endeavor to see both him and Eugene to-morrow," replied the lawyer, taking up his hat to accompany her home.

They left the bright, cheerful fire, which was now distributing its pleasant light and warmth into every nook and corner of the room, and passed out into the frosty air. The wind still swept through the streets with a dismal cry, and the night was unusually cold and dark. Isabel

paid but little heed to these discomforts, however, so intent was she upon the subjects of the late conversation. They continued to discuss the matter as they proceeded on their way, and became so absorbed in the plans laid out for future work, that the walk seemed unusually short. The lawyer declined entering, as the hour was late, and he had letters to write, and also thought it better to defer speaking to Eugene in regard to Henry until the next day. Again bidding her cheer up, and hope for the best, he bade her good-night, and turned to retrace his steps. Isabel softly opened the door, and passed into the dimly lighted parlor, where she found Annetta sitting before the fire awaiting her return, wondering greatly at her long absence.

"Dear sister," said she, "I have been so anxious about you, and real lonely too. I could not study; for thoughts of you kept coming between me and my books."

"But where is Eugene, and where are the usual recitations to-night? I thought you would both be so deeply engaged that I would never be missed," said Isabel, removing her hat and cloak, and taking a seat beside Annetta, who at once began to explain the cause of her sitting there alone. Eugene was suffering with a severe cold, she said, and had gone to his room, being too

unwell to hear her lessons that night. "And so I have been alone," she added, "sitting here, wishing you would come."

To satisfy Annetta's natural anxiety, Isabel explained to her that she had been to consult with their kind friend, Mr. Reed, in regard to her plan of procuring pupils in Music and Painting. Of Henry she said nothing, not wishing to distress her already overburdened heart with the additional fears and anxieties which oppressed her own. She told her frankly that their income was not sufficient for their wants, and that Eugene was daily exerting himself beyond his strength.

"And you know, dear," said she, "that our parents must want for nothing. You take such good care of them, Annetta, that I have concluded to go out into the world's great field of labor and find a little niche somewhere which I can fill; and perform, to the best of my ability, the work which I feel I am called upon to do."

"But can you do this?" said Annetta. "O, dear sister, won't it be a great task?" And she looked up with tearful eyes into the face of her brave sister, who she felt was undertaking too much for the feeble strength of one raised in the lap of luxury.

"I must do it, dear," said Isabel, kissing away

the tears ; "and you will see how bravely I shall conquer all the difficulties that come in my way."

"I know you are earnest and persevering, like Eugene," said Annetta ; "but I am afraid it will be too hard for you, dear Belle ; I am, indeed."

"God will help me, little sister ; never fear."

"I believe it, Belle. Eugene's comfort and strength all seems to come from Heaven. Don't you think so, sister ?"

"Yes, Annetta. He never could struggle so nobly onward beneath his many burdens, if he were not aided by the ever-helping hand of the Father in heaven, in whom he has such unwavering faith."

"Did you notice, sister, how fervently he said that prayer last Sunday, when he repeated it with the congregation, at Church ?"

"Yes ! Every word came from his heart, I know, and ascended on high to Him who never fails to hear the prayers of a trusting soul."

"How much I wish I loved Him like Eugene !" said Annetta, with a sigh.

"That wish finds an echo in my own heart, little sister ; and I am trying every day to love Him more."

"And I, too, have been long trying to follow Eugene's example. But last night he told me

he was full of faults, and had need of prayer constantly to keep his own heart right in the sight of God; and he told me I must take Christ alone for my leader, and follow Him."

"And we will accept Him as our leader, dear little sister; and let us try together to follow Him. We can help each other, and Eugene will help us both."

"Yes; for he says the love of Christ in our hearts is calculated to meet the great want of life," said Annetta. "It is this knowledge which keeps him so cheerful and kind, I am sure. He says that this alone will fill that void in the heart which so often yearns for something that will fully satisfy."

"And I think he is right; for, you know, he never is restless, never complains or grows weary in well-doing," remarked Isabel, gazing thoughtfully into the fire.

"I heard him talking to mamma, yesterday, on that very point," said Annetta.

"And what did she say?" asked Isabel, eagerly.

"I did not hear all she said," replied Annetta; "but she seemed to think that her trials were not of a nature to draw her thoughts to Heaven. She said something about being so weighed down by trouble, she had no strength to look beyond them if she wished."

"Poor mamma ; she has so much to grieve her God grant her strength to bear it !" said Isabel, earnestly.

"And to look up, too," was Annetta's whispered response.

"Yes, indeed, darling ; let this be our prayer for both our afflicted parents."

A long silence followed ; for the sisters seemed absorbed in thought. Suddenly they were aroused by the sound of the clock, which chimed forth the hour of midnight. Surprised to learn how quickly the time had passed, they hastened at once to their room.





CHAPTER VIII.

MR. REED regained his office, glad to find shelter there from the whistling wind and the white, feathery flakes of snow that were now falling rapidly. By the aid of the grim-looking boot-jack, another pair of boots were added to the stock already on hand in the quiet nook, and the lawyer's feet were snugly incased in a pair of comfortable slippers. The table was drawn closer to the fire, the books and papers were thrust into close quarters on one side, and the lawyer began his work. Rapidly the pen dashed over the paper. One mis-sive completed, it was placed in its yellow cover, properly sealed, and directed. A second sheet was spread out; the pen was already forming the first letter, when the sound of the door-bell again rang through the room with startling distinctness.

“Who can that be, at such an hour?” exclaimed Mr. Reed, dropping his pen in haste. “It must be urgent business that sends any one out in

such a storm. Possibly some one who desires to have a will drawn up."

He opened the door. A gust of wind swept in; and, for a moment, he could see nothing but the great flakes of snow which drifted in, to his very feet. Beyond the threshold, nothing was visible but the murky darkness of the night. He stepped out, and looked up and down the street, when suddenly a voice at his elbow spoke his name. He turned in the direction of the voice, and his eyes fell upon the figure of a man leaning against the house. His hat was drawn over his eyes, and his head bent as if to ward off the wind and snow. Mr. Reed addressed him, and asked his business. As he spoke, the figure emerged from the shadow of the house, and, stepping forward, stood beside him, raising his hat at the same time. The light from the hall-lamp fell directly upon his face. Mr. Reed stepped back in surprise.

"Henry," cried he, "what brings you here? What has happened?" And visions of sudden illness, danger, and accident arose before him; for what but necessity would have brought Henry Brasure to him at such a time?

"I have come to tell you I am going away, sir, and want you to tell them," said Henry, in an excited manner.

"Going away!" echoed Mr. Reed. "You don't mean that, I'm sure. Come, step in, Henry, out of the storm, and explain your meaning."

"No," said Henry, drawing back, "there's no explanation needed. I simply said I intended going away; and my object in coming here is to ask you to break the news to those I leave behind me."

"This is unaccountable. Come, do step into my office, and let us talk the matter over." And he laid his hand persuasively upon Henry's.

"I can not. Time passes. In an hour, I shall be far away. Will you tell them at home?" asked Henry, stepping away from the lawyer's side, as if fearing detention.

"But where are you going, Henry, and for what? I beg of you, do nothing hastily. You are excited, and will surely regret this step."

And he advanced toward Henry, who retreated backward, saying, in a quick, resolute tone:

"It matters not now where I am going. The future will tell. I only ask you to tell them I am gone, and that I left a good-bye for them all with you. And tell them, too, that it will be useless to try to discover my whereabouts. In time, they will know. And say to them, too, that I am not worth grieving for, nor worthy a single sigh of regret."

"O, Henry, how can you speak so? How can you do this? I beg of you, pause! Let me ask—"

"Ask me nothing," interrupted the excited Henry. "Only tell me you will deliver my message at home. Surely, you can not refuse me that."

"I do not refuse any thing, Henry, my boy. I only—"

"Enough. You do not refuse; then you have promised. Farewell!" And, with a sudden movement, Henry turned, waved his hand as if in token of an adieu, and sped rapidly down the street.

"Henry! Henry!" called the lawyer; but the only answer he received was the dismal sound of the wailing wind.

To spring into the office, don the discarded boots, and catch up his hat, was but the work of a moment. Closing the outer door with a bang that resounded throughout the whole house, he started, at his utmost speed, in the direction which Henry had taken.

"O, that I could but overtake him, could but persuade him to give up this strange undertaking, whatever it may be!" said he, as he pressed hurriedly forward.

Square after square was left behind. His pace

never slackened; his one thought, saving Henry. But no Henry appeared in sight. Once or twice, he fancied he saw him; but, upon overtaking the person, it proved to be a stranger. Disheartened and out of breath, he paused at last for a moment's rest, and began to consider what it was best to do under such trying circumstances. Not knowing in what direction now to proceed, he felt that it would be worse than useless to attempt to track him further.

"Eugene must know of this," said he; and, acting upon the impulse of the moment, his steps were immediately turned in that direction.

Facing the wind, he walked on. The way was dark and lonely, and his heart heavy and sad. The distance seemed great, and the time appeared to drag wearily by, though he walked as rapidly as wailing winds and drifting snow would permit, and at last stood before the house. All was silent and dark. No signs were to be seen which indicated that any of the inmates were astir. For the first time, the lateness of the hour occurred to the lawyer's mind.

"After midnight," said he, "and they are sleeping. Would it be wise and best to awaken them? Can any thing be done now? Is it not already too late?" And Henry's words, "In an hour, I shall be far away," came back with force upon

him. "The hour is already past," said he, "and Henry undoubtedly is far on his way. Misguided boy! And what a task he has left for me!"

Long he stood, scarcely knowing what plan to pursue; deciding, finally, that, as it was already too late to take any decided steps, it would be useless, even cruel, to arouse the family and inflict upon them so heavy a blow.

"Let them rest. Soon enough must they learn of the additional burden to be rolled upon them," said he, as he turned away; and again passed over the lonely road, musing sadly over this new trial in store for his afflicted friends, regretting that to him had been delegated the sad duty of imparting to them the unwelcome news.

Reaching his office again, he shook off the snow with which he was covered, realizing for the first time that, in his excitement, he had gone out into the storm without an overcoat to protect him from the piercing cold of that wild December night. Deeply troubled, he sat down to think and plan; and when at last he extinguished the light and went to his room, the clock pointed to the hour of three.

"Sister Belle," said Annetta, on the following morning, "do n't you think papa has been improving very much the last few weeks?"

"Yes, dear. I have been watching a gradual change for some time, and rejoicing over it in secret; fearing to mention my hopes to you too soon, lest he might sink into the old way again, and disappoint you sadly."

"I have felt just so myself, dear sister; but, the last few days, he has been quite talkative, and came into the study; one evening, and stood a long time behind my chair, while Eugene was explaining a problem in Algebra. I'm afraid I thought more about him, just then, than I did of the problem."

"I think," replied Isabel, "that our poor mother has been noting the change too; for she seems in better spirits lately, and appears to be stronger too. I believe if our father recovers, she will be herself again, as of old."

"O, I am sure of it," said Annetta; "and who knows, sister dear, but that we may be very happy yet?"

Isabel smiled upon her hopeful sister; but a sigh struggled up from the depths of her heart: "Poor darling!" thought she, "God grant that her life may indeed be one of peace, if not of perfect happiness!"

"I am going to read to him to-day, Belle. Eugene brought me a book last night, which, I fancy, will fix his attention for a little while

at least," she added as a recollection of many such attempts, fruitless and saddening, came unbidden before her. They descended to the breakfast-room below, and soon the family were gathered around the table. The room was pleasant and cheerful; the glories of the morning sun were every-where apparent; and the ruddy blaze of the fire sent forth a warmth and cheering glow very grateful this cold Winter morning. And yet—there was a great contrast between the small, plainly furnished apartment, and the large, commodious one so elegantly fitted up at Clifton Place. Mrs. Brasure seldom entered the room without feeling the change, and mentally regretting it, with a pain in her heart almost as keen as that which was experienced upon the first day of her arrival there, some years before. She could not become reconciled. Within her heart a rebellious feeling continually made itself felt; and while striving to appear calm and contented for the sake of her children, there were never-ending chafings and silent murmurings within. Such a state of feeling could not fail to produce evil results, and naturally made sad havoc of her peace, and brought about a feeble state of health. A hopeless despondency was apparent in all her movements, though she seldom gave vent to her feelings.

As she took her place at the table this bright morning, mentally regretting the absence of the elegant silver service to which she had from childhood been accustomed, her eyes fell upon the pleasant faces gathered around her, and she could not fail to perceive that a feeling of unusual contentment and peace seemed to pervade the little circle. Mr. Brasure evinced more interest in the conversation than usual, and even took some part in it himself, to the great delight of all; to none more than the attentive Annetta, who always took it upon herself to see that his wants were well supplied; in addition to which, she sought to keep him both pleased and interested. Mrs. Brasure watched him a little while, and a pleased, glad look came into her eyes, and within her heart stole a feeling of peace and rest, such as she had not known for years. "I will conquer this discontent," thought she; "I will learn the lessons taught me by my children;" and a feeling of shame for her past weakness came over her. As Henry seldom made his appearance till after the breakfast-hour had passed, his absence was not remarked. Isabel was quieter than the rest upon the present occasion; for she was anxiously awaiting an opportunity to unfold her new plans to Eugene, half fearing he would oppose, yet quite determined to win his approval

at last. Breakfast over, Mr. Brasure went to his study, and the family separated, each intent upon the performance of his or her respective duties. . . .

The day has passed. 'Tis evening again, dark and cheerless without ; but O, who can tell how dark and cheerless within ! The new-born peace and hope of the morning had vanished. The clouds which had been lifted for a little while, letting in upon them, for a moment, a flood of golden sunshine, had lowered again ; and how drear, how ominous and threatening ! The blow had fallen ! Henry's message had been delivered, and with it came a weight of sadness which pen can not portray. Mrs. Brasure sat like one suddenly stunned. She could not at once realize that her boy had really left his home and become a wanderer ; she felt grieved, she said, that he had been so discontented, but was sure he would soon be home again. But when told that he had desired Mr. Reed to say that he was not worthy a sigh of regret, the full force of his words came like a sudden flood upon her, and she moaned and wept piteously.

"We have been unkind to him ; we have driven him from us !" she cried. "O, that we had been more patient !"

It had been thought advisable to conceal the

fact of Henry's departure, from his father, as long as possible; but with an eye which seemed to be slowly regaining its power of penetration, he saw that some new calamity had befallen them. He questioned Annetta, but she adroitly evaded him; he afterward learned all by accidentally overhearing the bitter lamentations of his wife. He entered the room where she sat, and going to her, quietly and gently, laid his hand upon her bowed head, and tried to murmur some words of comfort. Surprised at the unusual act, she raised her head, and, seeing the look of sympathy with which he regarded her, she threw herself into his arms, weeping bitterly, exclaiming brokenly, "O, Arthur, to think of our poor boy—our Henry—a wanderer now upon the face of the earth!"

"Maria," said he, speaking with great difficulty, "we have no son but Eugene." Rising, he approached the mantel-piece over which hung a portrait of Henry. Slowly he turned it with the face toward the wall, shaking his head mournfully, saying as before, "We have no son but Eugene." He immediately left the room, and with a slow, uneven step, passed to his study. Half frightened at his strange manner, Mrs. Brasure followed him, but could not draw him into conversation. He sat with his head bowed upon the table before him, his long gray beard

sweeping his breast. From that day he gradually failed in both body and mind. All the signs of returning health which had given rise to so many fond hopes, now faded away. He became very weak and feeble; his form was bent, and his head was usually bowed upon his breast. He was silent, moody, and forgetful; often recognizing with difficulty even the members of his own household. Upon each and all, the sorrow fell heavily. Beneath the burden of increased trouble, each staggered forth with a sadder heart to battle with the daily trials and wants which beset them on every hand.

Annetta went quietly to Henry's room, and sadly gathered up his books, pictures, and all other articles which had been his; she packed them carefully away, divining that the sight of them added to her mother's grief. With the precision of a woman of mature years, she folded every garment which he had left, and placed them in the depths of a great trunk. When all was finished, her fortitude gave way, and she buried her face in the pillows and wept long and bitterly. With a strong effort at self-control, she rose at last, and bathed her eyes carefully, just as she had so often done years ago, when she was but a little child. Smoothing back her disordered hair, she raised the window, standing there

a few moments that the cold air might fan her fevered brow and bear away the traces of her tears. Regaining a semblance, at least, of calmness, she went down to see if her mother would like her to read to her, or if she could do any thing to interest her poor father, who sat for hours now, almost immovable in the study.

To Isabel, the silence and sadness which reigned throughout the house was especially oppressive. To her it seemed as if the great king of terrors was hovering there, and thoughts of death and the grave clung to her as she passed through the silent rooms; for Henry, with all his faults, had been the life of the house. Naturally light-hearted and merry, when not in an irritable mood, he would pass in and out of the house, up and down stairs and through the halls, whistling some lively air, or singing, with his clear, full voice, snatches of songs that pleased his fancy; and the quiet which reigned there since his departure, seemed like that of death. Eugene sought relief in work, constant employment seeming to be the only refuge he could find from the sadness which often oppressed even his own brave heart, save the precious hours spent in drawing comfort from that Source which never failed. Isabel felt that she, too, must be employed. She assured Eugene that she would

be happier if she were engaged in something which would leave her neither time nor opportunity for brooding over the past, and indulging in fears for the future. Accordingly, she went earnestly to work, and, through the influence of Mr. Reed, soon had a class of pupils with which to begin; and so rapidly did it increase in numbers, that in a short time she was fully occupied. She became interested in her new work, and entered upon it with a determination to succeed. She was not long in discovering that her path was by no means a flowery one. Many a thorn appeared where least expected, and many a wound was received which deeply pained her sensitive nature. Another source of secret sorrow had been found in the manner of Henry's departure, and she often asked herself if she had said too much for his proud nature to bear; and yet she felt that she had only pointed out to him the plain path of duty. Once she spoke of these doubts to Mr. Reed; but he told her she had nothing with which she needed reproach herself. She had tried to perform a sister's duty, and the result was not a fault of her own. She tried to take comfort from his words, and sought, like Eugene, to find relief in work.

Poor, patient Annetta! To her was it given to be the ministering angel of the household.

Hers was the task of comforting, cheering, and helping the dear ones, who were so incapable of taking up life's burdens and bearing them bravely onward,—the one seeing life only through the mists of a clouded mind, the other held down by the strong chains of physical ailment; for, since the departure of her boy, she, too, had grown feebler, and more in need of care than before; and to Annetta was given the work to which she seemed best adapted, and which she faithfully performed, day after day—never growing weary with the tasks she undertook, ever looking upon all as a labor of love.





CHAPTER IX.

ONE bright Spring morning, Isabel started out on her accustomed round of teaching. The air was clear and bracing, and she walked rapidly onward, thinking of the duties she must accomplish before night. She paused before an elegant residence, situated upon one of the most fashionable streets in the city. Passing up the marble steps that shone white and beautiful in the clear light of the morning sun, she rang the bell. The summons was answered by a servant in livery, who ushered her at once into the library. Leaving her alone, he went to inform his young mistress of her arrival. An easel stood near one of the richly curtained windows, upon which lay an unfinished picture. Isabel sat down before it, and contemplated it for some moments, as if seeking for signs of improvement in her pupil's work. Taking up the brush, she was soon at work upon it herself. So engrossed did she become in her favorite art, that she did not notice the entrance of a young

lady who advanced and stood behind her chair. "I am sorry to have kept you waiting, Miss Brasure," said she.

Isabel looked up from her work with a smile as she replied, "I have not been idle, you see;" and she pointed to the picture as she spoke.

"O, how beautiful! how perfect!" exclaimed the lady, bending over it in delight. "That is just the touch I wanted to give, but could not. Ah! there's nothing like being mistress of the art, Miss Brasure. My poor efforts are so weak and uncertain."

"Indeed, Miss Mason, I think you have every reason to feel encouraged. You are making rapid progress. I was quite surprised, myself, when I stood before your picture, this morning, and am not right sure that I ought to have meddled with it," said the teacher, smiling.

"I am glad you did, Miss Brasure. Your touch was needed to give effect to the picture. I am really very grateful for the expression you have given to the eyes. They seemed so blank and soulless before."

As the lesson proceeded, and the picture grew beneath the touch of the pupil, aided by suggestions from the skillful teacher, a pleasant conversation was kept up between them.

"By the way, Miss Brasure," said the young

lady, looking up from her work, "I heard a gentleman speaking of you last night. He used to be a friend of yours, he said, and a frequent visitor at your house. Can you guess his name?"

"I think not," replied Isabel. "I am not at all skillful in guessing, or solving enigmas of any kind."

"Then, I suppose, I must tell you. It was Mr. Winchell. He was telling me that you used to live in grand style, in a beautiful mansion-house, surrounded by acre after acre of well-cultivated grounds, beautifully laid out." And, resuming her pencil, the thoughtless girl talked on, all unconscious of the pain she was inflicting upon her hearer. "By the way, do you know," said she, "I always fancied you had seen better days? and if there is a class of people for whom I feel a deep sympathy, it is those who have been reduced from affluence to comparative poverty." Foolish girl! How little she knew of the instinctive shrinking of the heart from that sympathy which finds vent in allusions to the painful subject.

"Mr. Winchell and I differ on the subject," continued she. "We really had quite a little quarrel about it. I actually told him he was heartless. He has no feeling for the misfortunes of others; and, would you believe it, really said

that, with the loss of fortune, one actually lost caste in society. It may be so; but I am sure it is not right. Mamma says I am young and simple, and told Mr. Winchell he was quite right, and must not mind all I said, for I was an independent, rather willful, little creature. But I really do not believe in throwing off one's friends just because they chance to have less of this world's goods than formerly."

Isabel made no reply, and her pupil continued in a lively, easy manner :

"He said you had a sister too, the oddest little creature—very staid and womanly now, though she was once a sprightly, pretty child. I suppose you know, of course, that his uncle, Mr. Monroe, wanted to buy your father's place. Mr. Winchell told me about it only last evening. He said your brother was as proud and haughty and distant as a millionaire, and that he and his lawyer displayed so much arrogance and pride whenever the subject of a sale was mentioned, that they did not succeed in making any bargain at all; for which he declares he has owed them a grudge ever since. But the funniest part of the whole affair is, that Mr. Monroe now insists upon it that he never wanted Clifton Place, and would not accept it upon any terms. But I've no doubt anger and chagrin were the true causes of that

remark. A species of sour grapes ; don't you think so ?”

“Very likely,” said Isabel, in a low voice, which she vainly strove to keep from trembling.

Miss Mason was too much absorbed in the topic to notice her reply, and went on to say : “I am quite sure I shall never like Mr. Winchell again ; though mamma says I am very foolish, and insists that I shall treat him well, for he is said to be very wealthy. But he is so impertinent ! Why, he asked me if I knew where you lived ; and when I said no, he laughed, and said it was a little out-of-the-way sort of a place on the edge of the town, and even promised to drive down that way if I wanted to see the castle. And then, upon receiving an indignant reply from me, he laughed as if he thought it all a very good joke.” She looked up as she finished the last sentence, and something in the expression of Isabel's face aroused her to a sudden sense of her own imprudence.

“There !” she exclaimed, impulsively. “I am always doing something wrong. I ought not have told you this. I have hurt your feelings ; but, indeed, Miss Brasure, it was through thoughtlessness. I'm so sorry !” And she looked up as if expecting a reply. Isabel's self-control aided her now, though she felt wounded to the heart.

"Never mind it now, Miss Mason," she said, her voice trembling upon every word, notwithstanding her efforts to appear calm. "But, in future, let us not refer to the subject."

Miss Mason understood the reproof, and mentally resolved not to meddle with other people's affairs.

"I am sure," said she, deprecatingly, "that you are a person of too good sense to mind it. But you have never spoken of your sister! Do, pray, tell me; is she so odd-looking?"

The moment the words had escaped her lips she inwardly said: "There! meddling again!" But she waited eagerly for the answer.

"I have never discovered any thing odd-looking, Miss Mason. She is a very lovable, amiable girl. If sorrows have robbed her of any portion of the sprightliness or vivacity of her childish days, they have compensated her by giving, instead, a sweetness of disposition, kindness of heart, and gentleness of speech and manner which can not be surpassed."

She spoke warmly, for her heart was touched; and, though she felt able and willing to endure slights herself, she had not schooled herself into bearing them in silence when they touched in any way the sister she so dearly loved. She rose to go as she spoke, and her pupil again

expressed regret for the unfortunate turn which the conversation had taken.

Isabel left the house, after giving a few parting directions concerning the picture. She felt angry with herself for having betrayed her weakness, and tried hard to overcome and subdue the pain which Miss Mason's remarks had occasioned. As she walked on toward the place where her next lesson was to be given, sad thoughts of other days came over her, which she vainly sought to conquer.* All the scenes of her girlhood passed in review before her, and she mentally contrasted them with the present. She thought of Annetta too, the dear girl, who had never known the delights of a fresh, young life, happy and buoyant as hers had once been; she who, while still a child, had acquired womanly ways, and stepped from the bright path of childhood into that which brings care, sorrow, and unrest.

As she turned the corner, she came face to face with Mr. Winchell. A cold, distant bow was exchanged, and each passed the other carelessly by. Isabel had never placed a very high estimate upon the character of the man. Still, she had not supposed that any one who had so often shared the hospitalities of her home could have proved quite so ungrateful. The meeting was sudden and unexpected, and, in her present

state of feeling, very unpleasant. She reached the place, just then, where she designed making her next call, and was soon engaged guiding awkward little fingers over the keys of a piano. Painfully every false note grated upon her ear; and it seemed little less than a species of torture to sit quietly there, listening to the discordant sounds which the child drew from the instrument. When the heart is weary, worn, and out of tune, what can be more trying than the unmusical thumping of a beginner in the great science of music? The endless repetitions, and the frequent failures, produced in poor Isabel's heart that day the wildest tumult; and, with a feeling of relief, she left the house. Not daring to trust herself to give another lesson in her present nervous, excited state, she walked on a few blocks, and entered Eugene's office. He at once perceived that her walk had wearied her, or that she wanted to be alone, for some cause, in order to gain the mastery of feelings which had, by some means, gained the ascendancy.

Without a word of inquiry or comment, he led the way to a small private room beyond the main office; and, closing the door, left her quite alone. An hour passed by, and she arose, calm and composed, ready for her work again. Eugene's Bible lay upon a table beside the little

window, which opened upon a kind of court; and from the window of a dark, gloomy-looking house, an old man, weary with life's pilgrimage, looked out. As his time-dimmed eyes wandered over the few objects to be seen in that narrow court, they fell upon the face of Isabel bending over Eugene's precious Bible. As he looked, she arose; and, clasping the book to the heart whose tumultuous throbbings of unrest its sweet consolations had stilled, she kneeled, and, in a fervent, heart-felt prayer, poured out all her griefs, and asked for strength to toil on till she had finished the work He had given her to do. This, then, was the secret of her victory over self. An hour with God! Who can estimate its value? The old man's eyes filled with tears as, from his place beside his own window, he murmured, "God bless that dear young lady!" She knew not that any eye had witnessed her devotions, nor did she pause then to explain any of her troubles to Eugene. A few pleasant, cheering words were exchanged; and then smilingly she turned to the door, saying, cheerfully:

"Well, Eugene, I am ready now to take up my burdens again; so, for a few hours, good-bye."

"Good-bye, sister Belle. If the burdens become too heavy, come any time and leave a portion there." And he pointed to the little

room. "This evening," he added, "we will compare notes."

"And see who has borne the greater burden?"

"We will see, rather, who has had greater blessings for which to be thankful," said he.

"He is right," thought Isabel, as she proceeded on her way. "In thinking of the ills of life, we are too apt to lose sight of the blessings which are showered upon us."

Her next lesson over, she passed on to the third; and so on, till the last task of the day was accomplished, and she was at liberty to go home. Annetta met her at the door, gently took off her hat and shawl, asked kindly about the duties of the day, and urged her to rest quietly on the lounge till Eugene came; and, in her pleasant way, sought to enliven and cheer her by her usual interesting chat, moving about as she talked, busying herself in arranging every thing for the evening repast, in order that, when Eugene should come, all would be in readiness. There was an air of neatness in all that she did, which, together with the cheerfulness which she sought to impart, made even that humble room look inviting. Isabel watched her as she stepped so quickly about, and, with a half-drawn sigh, thought of the daily tasks of which the dear child said nothing. "May God reward her for

all her self-sacrificing care!" was the silent prayer wafted from the pure fount of a sister's heart.

Days, weeks, and months rolled onward, and onward still, till two more years were added to the record of the past; and yet no tidings came of Henry. Long weary years had they seemed to the hearts waiting so anxiously for some word concerning the wanderer. Once, only, had Mr. Reed received any intimation of his whereabouts; a note had reached him a short time after he left home, stating that he had been sick, and was accordingly in need of money, and desired a certain sum as a loan. He entreated the lawyer to say nothing in regard to him or the required amount, till he heard from him again; adding, that he would not have asked this favor had sickness not overtaken him. Of his destination or future prospects he said nothing further than that he should leave the place from which the letter was mailed, as soon as the money he asked for should be received.

Mr. Reed wrote to him, entreating him to return, setting plainly before him the condition of affairs at home; showing him kindly, yet plainly, how truly his conduct was poisoning the happiness and ruining the health of his friends who so truly loved him and sincerely mourned over the cruel manner of his desertion. He sent the

money, and a sufficient sum in addition to defray his expenses home, with the request that it should not be looked upon as a loan, assuring him that payment would never be required. With considerable anxiety he looked for the reply, but failed to receive any further tidings concerning him. Of the whole affair he said nothing, since there was really nothing to be drawn from it which could be of the least comfort to them.

"If we only knew he was well and free from want or suffering," was the constant cry of the mother's heart, echoed by every member of her household band. At times, the thought came over them that possibly he might even now be numbered among the dead; but from it they turned with a feeling of dread.

"O," cried Mrs. Brasure one morning, after a sleepless night spent in thinking of her absent boy, "can it be that he has sickened and died in some far-away land, tended by strangers, and buried upon some foreign shore? How can I endure the thought? O my son, my beloved, handsome boy!"

It required all Annetta's skillful nursing and gentle loving words of kindness and cheer, to soothe into comparative rest that storm-tossed, troubled spirit. Such scenes were of frequent occurrence now; for the long-continued suspense

was slowly but surely wearing away all the strength of mind and character she had formerly possessed, making sad inroads upon the delicate constitution. Almost daily, the watchful eyes of her devoted children detected some new sign of failing health. Doctor Grey was summoned to attend her ; but she turned wearily away from all his questionings, saying, " No, no, I am not ill ; I am only tired, Doctor ; and O, I want my boy, my poor Henry, wandering I know not where ! " All the good doctor's skill was of no avail ; and, as is customary in all cases where other remedies fail, a change of scene was recommended. But to such a proposition she would not listen for a moment.

" What ! " said she, " leave my home ; go away from the only spot where I may ever expect to hear from him ? He may come at any moment. I am always looking for him ; and what would he think were I not here to welcome him back to my home and my heart ? How would he then regard the mother who has watched and waited and prayed for him all these weary years ? My place is here ; my work, the weary waiting for a step I long to hear, and listening to catch the tones of that voice for which my heart is hungering every hour."

Mr. Brasure remained the same immovable,

quiet man he had ever been since Henry's departure. Doctor Grey expressed no hope of any other change for him now, except a gradual failing as he neared the end of life's journey. "He might," said the doctor, "have at last regained a portion of his former strength and vitality, had he continued to improve as we had reason to hope for, judging by the signs so plainly seen just before this sad occurrence. The shock was too great for the weak state of mind and body, and naturally produced evil results. A relapse has followed, from which I dare not now encourage you to hope he will ever rally."

Ay : the rash step of the thoughtless boy had rudely knocked from beneath his father's tottering form every prop upon which he leaned ; and he had fallen now to a depth from which no power save that of his Creator might raise him more, and his life henceforth must be but a living death. The verdict was passed ; but what a sentence of doom was this for the ears of those who had yearned so earnestly for a far different report ! It is so natural for poor human hearts to hope, even upon the very verge of despair. Upon poor, patient Annetta, the words fell with crushing force. Every day, every hour, was she brought face to face with the bitter realization of that sentence. For her, there was no by-path into which

she might turn aside when the way seemed hedged up with sorrows and her feet grew weary. A plain duty lay before her ; and to that path she was pointed by its requirements, urged onward by the voice of filial affection. Eugene and Isabel were out in the world, each engaged in the active duties of life. For them there was change of scene and air, and daily contact with the busy, hurrying throng ever pressing through the city streets. There were sights for the eye, and sounds for the ear, all calculated to draw the thoughts away from self, and prevent the heart from dwelling upon any one theme to the exclusion of all else. For Annetta, there was no such change ; few opportunities occurred which served to give diversity to the usual routine of her daily life. Doctor Grey came in, one bright Spring morning, and noticing that her countenance was unusually pale, and her step slow and languid, proposed that she should accompany him for a drive into the country. But as Isabel was absent from home, giving lessons, and would not return for some hours, Annetta could not be persuaded to leave her parents, though Martha, their faithful, long-tried servant promised to supply every want. The kind-hearted doctor bid her a pleasant good-bye, and drove at once to Eugene's office. As he came in sight, Eugene dropped his pen

and hurried to the door, fearful that something had gone wrong at home. Seeing the expression of anxiety upon his young friend's face, the good doctor called out cheerily: "Good morning, Eugene; I've just come from your place, and found them all getting along very nicely."

"Glad to hear it," responded Eugene, with a sense of relief. "Won't you come in?"

"No; I would greatly prefer to have you come out. In fact, I want to borrow an hour or so of your time; and as it is much pleasanter out in the open air than in that close office, I propose that you step into my buggy, and we can talk as we drive along." Eugene agreed to the doctor's proposition, and going back into the office to give a few necessary directions, soon returned and drove away with his friend; for as such he had been long accustomed to consider him. "Eugene," said he, "there is a little matter I would like to speak of, and I am going to be very plain. You are aware of the fact that I am very frank and candid in all my professional affairs; you will find I am equally so with my friends, especially when wishing to advise with them."

"I am always grateful for your advice, Doctor; and am ready for a plain, straightforward talk, even though you are going to lecture me for my misdeeds," said Eugene, pleasantly.

"I have no fault to find with you, Eugene; right glad am I to say it. The subject of my discourse this morning, is to be your sister Annetta."

"One which is near my heart, I assure you," replied Eugene.

"Do you know, Eugene, that the poor girl is staggering under a burden far too heavy for such young shoulders?" asked he.

"Yes," was the reply; "I know it too well, and have striven in vain to relieve her of a portion of its weight. But, Doctor, she is never so well satisfied as when engaged in some service for either our father or mother; nor are they ever so well contented as when she is beside them. I know she is too closely confined and too constantly occupied for her own good; but how can the evil be remedied? I shall be glad of your advice, and have thought of consulting you upon that very point; but have been prevented from so doing by Annetta herself."

"But it must be remedied; there's no question about that!" exclaimed the doctor, warmly.

"But how shall it be done?" asked Eugene.

"That is the point to be settled to-day. I was quite startled, this morning, by the look of weariness and languor which she strove in vain to conceal from me. I tried to persuade her to drive out with me for an hour or so, but could

not prevail upon her to go. She was going to read to her mother, she said, for the purpose of drawing her thoughts away from a bad dream she had last night about Henry."

"He is never absent from her thoughts!" said Eugene, sadly.

"No; and when I think of it, I declare I lose all patience with the boy. If he must be off to try the world's hard usage for himself, I hope he is satisfied; but there is no reason why he need worry his friends till they have n't an hour's comfort. He might, at least, have the grace to let folks know where he is;" and the excited doctor energetically wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"He may not be in the land of the living, Doctor," said Eugene, in a low voice.

"True; it may be so—poor deluded boy!" said the doctor, in a mollified tone.

"It is the suspense which is wearing away the very life of our mother," said Eugene; "she is constantly listening for his step. Every sound which falls upon her ear startles her even from her sleep. This is one reason why Annetta remains with her so constantly. She watches her slumbers, to guard against sudden noises or surprises, knowing so well how nervous and excitable she has become."

“Well, but she must not be permitted to wear away her own life, as she is doing,” replied the doctor. “I really can not stand by and see the child I have loved for years, sacrificing all the days of her youth as she seems bent upon doing.”

“But, Doctor, she loves to do it, and does not look upon it as a sacrifice. I have urged her—so, too, has Isabel—to delegate a portion, at least, of her duties to us; but she delights in feeling that she is of use to them, and insists upon it that the work in which her sister and I are already engaged is as much as we should do.”

“I readily agree with her there; and it is perfectly right and proper for her to look after the comfort and welfare of your parents, and see to the interests of the household generally. I do not interfere with her rights upon these points. I only insist upon her taking some care of her own health and spirits at the same time, and advise her to share these labors with another. She is too young to have so much care. A skillful, competent nurse must be procured, who can relieve her for a few hours, at least, each day.”

“Your suggestion is a good one, Doctor, if she would but consent to the plan. There is also another difficulty in the way. Our parents have

become so accustomed to the quiet, secluded life we have led for a number of years past, that they are greatly annoyed by the presence of strangers. Father shrinks from the sound of an unknown voice. Annetta is aware of this, and, in fact, shares the feeling. I am afraid it will be something of a task if we set ourselves to work to gain the consent of all parties."

"We can try the experiment, at least. If it does not work well, we must then resort to something else, or Isabel must certainly give up her present work and share Annetta's labors."

After conversing for some time upon the subject, they decided to proceed at once to carry their plans into execution. They drove back to the office, where they were met by Isabel. Eugene stepped out, and the doctor proposed taking Isabel home. She accepted the offered kindness, and on the way he unfolded to her the change which he and Eugene proposed making in their household arrangements. She gladly seconded their wishes, and promised to use her influence with Annetta. Arriving at the gate, he sent her in with a message to Annetta to the effect that he was waiting for her, and desired her to come at once, prepared for a ride. She soon appeared, though she told him he had called her from some very important duties,

which she had been obliged to leave now in Isabel's hands.

"Quite right," said he. "I must not be partial, you know; and, having taken Eugene out for a drive, and afterward Isabel, whom I picked up on the way, it is now your turn."

Out into the clear air of the country, where the birds made sweet music, and the green grass and stately trees gladdened the eyes, he took her. And she enjoyed it so greatly that his own eyes wore a brighter, happier look as they witnessed her pleasure. He spoke to her, then, of the nurse whom they wished to engage, and the changes they desired to bring about. She was startled, and very reluctant to yield her work to another.

"We do not ask you to give it up," said he; "we only wish you to have an able assistant—one who can do for them far more than you are able to accomplish."

She asked for time to consider the matter; for, to her, it seemed very unpleasant and unnatural to call in a stranger to perform the little acts which she had so long been accustomed to performing herself. Eugene and Isabel urged her to comply, while the good doctor went himself to lay the matter before Mrs. Brasure.

"Don't ask me," said she. "I do not wish

to see a stranger; least of all, a professional nurse."

But the zealous doctor did not yield the point. He preferred to let it drop for a few days only, leaving them to think over all that had been said.

The next day Mrs. Brasure laid upon the lounge in her darkened room. She watched Annetta as her head was bent over the work upon which she was engaged; and, for the first time, noticed how pale she had grown, and how quiet and womanly she had become. She thought of the contrast between her life and the days when Isabel was her age.

"I have been very selfish," said she, suddenly. Annetta looked up in surprise.

"Yes," she repeated, "I have been very selfish in appropriating your time and strength, my little daughter, all to myself. Put down that work, Annetta, and go out into the air."

"But, mamma——"

"I would rather you would go, dear; I do not need you."

"But you may want me soon; and, besides, I do not care to go out. Indeed, mamma, you are not selfish. My time is all your own. I am never so happy as when of use to you or poor papa."

"It has become a second nature to you, dear.

You were very sprightly and gay when a little child. Ah, my darling, of what have not our sad misfortunes robbed you?"

"Do not grieve over any thing of that kind, mother, dear. I do not regret them, and am really happy when I can do any thing to make you so."

"I am sure of that, my child; but your life thus far, since our troubles began, has certainly been a clouded one. I have grieved so long over our poor Henry's unknown fate that I fear I have been blind to the interests of those around me. But go now and take a walk, or lie down and rest; I am sure you need it. And when Doctor Grey comes, I would like to see him alone."

The doctor called, in a short time, and went at once to Mrs. Brasure's room. He remained for some time; and the result of the conversation became apparent when he appeared, the following day, with a quiet, pleasant-looking woman, whom he duly installed as nurse. Annetta stipulated that she was to be permitted to continue to read, or otherwise interest her parents, whenever they wished; to which the doctor yielded a ready assent, with the proviso that she was to drive out with him at least three times a week, besides taking a short walk every day.

Eugene and Isabel were well pleased with the turn affairs had taken, and thanked the doctor warmly for the interest he had shown, and the kindness with which he had carried out the project which they felt would be better for them all. They hoped to bring back the roses to Annetta's pale cheeks, and restore to her voice something of the joyous, tuneful ring to which they had listened with such pleasure in her childhood's days. That the additional expense entailed additional labor, they cared not; for what was an hour's extra toil compared with the health and comfort of those whom they loved?





CHAPTER X.

THE bleak, dreary month of November had passed, and frosty December had rolled round again. Day after day passed on, each following, in rapid succession, the footsteps of its predecessor; and now the holidays were at hand. The city streets were alive with the hurrying tide of humanity, which surged in all directions; and the shops were decked out in holiday attire, looking really gorgeous in their lavish displays of articles of all descriptions. Here were toys of every style and character, some boasting of beauty and delicacy of workmanship, others famous for their wonderful mechanism; and there might be seen gems and jewels flashing in the bright sunlight, while, on the other hand, silks, satins, ribbons, flowers, and an abundance of articles, both useful and ornamental, loom up before our gaze. Nor are the demands of the children forgotten in regard to the dainties and sweetmeats, which go far

toward making up a Merry Christmas and Happy New-Year to them. A goodly supply may be found upon all the corners, and every other available space, each and all calculated to lure within their charmed precincts the many passers-by.

A gay scene, indeed, did the city streets present. Mothers, with their little children, were there, looking bright and happy, while searching for the gifts of affection upon which they had bestowed so many pleasant thoughts. Fathers hurried along, carrying sundry mysterious packages; while among the throng might be seen the brothers and sisters too, looking very wise and thoughtful. Shop-boys innumerable elbowed their way through the crowd, intent upon delivering their many packages and bundles, of all shapes and sizes, in the shortest space of time possible.

Before a jeweler's establishment, upon one of the principal thoroughfares, stood a young man of prepossessing appearance. He paused a moment, as if in thought; then, with a faint smile just creeping about his lips, he entered the store. Glancing at the brilliant array of glittering, costly trinkets, temptingly displayed upon every side, he selected a heavy, plain gold ring, which he handed to a clerk, together with a

card, upon which was written the name he desired to have engraven upon the inner circle. After waiting a short time, he received it again from the hands of the polite attendant. Placing it in his vest-pocket, he left the store, and was soon lost in the crowd.

The busy hours of the day were all numbered at last, and the bells rang out the welcome chime which proclaimed release from its duties. Busy hands quickly restored order in the shops, while in the counting-rooms the clerks looked up with a sigh of relief as ledgers, journals, and day-books were closed and stowed away within the close embrace of the great iron safes. Keys were hastily turned; and the jingling sound has a pleasant ring to the ears weary with the bustle and confusion attendant upon business hours. From out one of the largest mercantile houses in the city a young man emerged, and walked with rapid step down the street. A certain something, which can scarcely be defined, attracts our attention; and involuntarily we turn to bestow a second glance upon the retreating figure, and at once recognize him as the individual whom we met, some hours previous, in the jeweler's establishment. There is the same firm tread, the manly bearing, and pleasant smile; but the streets are still echoing to the tread of

pedestrians homeward bound, and again we lose sight of the young man in whom we have taken an interest as yet quite unaccountable. The shadows of evening have now settled over the city; but yonder comes one whose business it is to banish, in part, the gathering darkness. Beneath his touch, little jets of flame flash out, at regular intervals, along the streets, bidding defiance to the gloom of the night. The moon, too, asserts her power; and, emerging from the white, fleecy clouds which have gathered about her, she looks gently down upon the scenes beneath her, heightening and beautifying all by her silvery light; and now the stars come forth, each resplendent in itself, yet "differing one from another in glory."

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Isabel Brasure, as she stood at the window, gazing out upon the glories of the moonlit scene. Annetta left her place by the fire snapping and flashing so cheerfully, and came to her sister's side. Isabel passed her arm caressingly about Annetta's slight form, as, bending down, she pressed a kiss upon the white forehead. "Shall you be lonely, dear, when I am gone?" she whispered, softly.

"Dear, dear Belle, how can you ask?" was the low, trembling response.

The arm tightened around her, and the head

was drawn lovingly to its resting-place upon a sister's breast. "I know not how to go, my darling ; it will be so hard to leave you."

Annetta raised her head ; and the dark eyes which met Isabel's, were shining upon her through tears. "And yet it will not be long, dear sister ; you will soon come again," she said.

"That is my comfort, dear ; I shall soon be with you again. At least such is my hope."

"And you will be so happy," murmured Annetta.

A step upon the graveled path startled them. Isabel glanced from the window, and a rosy flush flashed up from cheek to brow. Annetta kissed her hastily, and glided from the room, disappearing through a side-door as the one opposite opened to admit a visitor. Isabel smilingly advanced to meet the gentleman who entered ; and, as he stepped forward, again we recognize the fine-looking young man whom we have now met for the third time within the last few hours. Not having received the slightest intimation that our company is desired, we decline intruding our presence upon them, and will endeavor, therefore, to content ourselves for the present, waiting till time shall develop all that we fain would know.

After leaving the parlor, Annetta went at once to her mother's room ; she found her sitting in her

easy-chair, with an unopened book on the little table beside her. Before the fire, gazing vacantly upon the glowing coals, sat her father.

"Well, dear, you have beat a hasty retreat, I see," said Mrs. Brasure. "Has William come?"

"Yes, mamma; and I naturally concluded that upon the present occasion they had no special need of my company."

Mrs. Brasure smiled, as, pointing to the book, she said: "What is their loss is my gain; will you read awhile?"

"Certainly, mamma. My time, you know, is now and always at your disposal;" and in a clear, well-modulated voice, she began reading aloud. Page after page was perused, and chapter after chapter completed, before either reader or listener evinced signs of weariness. At last the book was laid aside, and Annetta remarked that the invalid's hour for retiring had long since passed. After bidding her mother an affectionate good-night, expressing at the same time a hope that she would rest well, and awake with renewed strength on the morrow, she went up to her father, and, tenderly passing her arm about his neck, bent down and kissed him good-night. In a low tone, he murmured a few unintelligible words, which fell sadly upon the heart of the devoted daughter. She still stood beside him,

looking tearfully down upon the gray head, wishing, O so earnestly, that he would but speak her name once more in the old fatherly way for which she had yearned so long. She passed her fingers gently through the gray locks as she stood musing there. He looked up at her then, as if recognizing the touch of his daughter's hand, and a faint smile hovered for a moment about his lips.

With a little cry of joy, she repeated the caress, saying softly: "Dear father, do speak to Nettie—your little Nettie." The words, together with the tone, so like those she had so often used years ago, when a little child standing on her stool beside his bed, seemed to arouse within his slumbering soul some long silent chord, which once again responded to her touch. He smiled again, and took her little trembling hand in his, nodding his head as he sometimes did when some little act of love and attention recalled, for a time, his wandering thoughts. He seemed pleased, and looked at her fixedly, as if trying to gather up the broken fragments of a shattered memory. She knelt down then on a stool at his feet, in the posture she had loved in the days of childhood. The simple act seemed to restore some missing link in the chain which bound them to the past; and he knew her as a child again, forgetting the years which intervened—the weary years, so blank

to him—and now, bending down, he drew her to him in the old caressing way, murmuring softly the pet names he had loved so long ago. O, the joy which filled her heart! Almost overcome, she leaned her head upon his breast a moment, half fearing to move lest it should all pass like a fleeting dream. He did not speak again, but sat looking at her as she talked to him, apparently trying to understand. Evidently the effort wearied him. Gradually his eyes lost the pleased expression which had crept into them as she talked; the lids fell wearily over them; and, leaning his head back upon his chair, like a tired child, he fell asleep.

Mrs. Brasure had witnessed this little scene with mingled feelings of joy and sadness. Seeing him roused, even for that brief period, from his habitual apathy, was in itself a source of joy, and from it a little germ of hope sprang up, from which she gathered a momentary comfort; for it whispered words of cheer, bidding her trust this as the glimmering dawn of returning reason; and yet, with this feeling, came also another which spoke only of sadness, disappointment, and depressing fears.

“I dare not encourage my poor heart to hope for any thing,” said she; “fearing I shall only reap bitter disappointment.”

"Dear mamma," said Annetta, "let us be thankful for even this. It was so sweet to hear his voice once more in its natural tone ; and perhaps, little by little, we may lead him on till at last he may remember and love us again as of old. What a precious boon that would be ! O, may God grant it to us !"

"Precious, indeed, would it be, my child," said her mother, in a faltering voice. "But," added she, "let me caution you against indulging too much in the illusions of hope. We have borne so many disappointments, dear, that I almost fear to look for any thing beyond that which Doctor Grey has told us to expect."

"I believe I am naturally hopeful, mamma."

"I know it, Annetta. Your hopeful disposition and self-sacrificing spirit have shed a happy influence about us all since our sad misfortunes. May God bless you, darling, for all you have been to me ! And I only want to spare you future pain by cautioning you now not to look for too much in your poor father's case. Gladly as I hail every indication of improvement, be it ever so slight, yet with it comes the thought of his weakened condition, and I can not but feel and realize—ah, how painfully !—that there is very little, if indeed any, sure foundation upon which to build a hope that may not be rudely shattered at last."

She spoke sadly, and Annetta felt that it would not be wise to prolong the conversation. She tried to speak cheerfully as she again reminded her of the lateness of the hour; and, bidding her a second good-night, she went at once to her own room to wait for Isabel. Hearing the front door close at last, she ran lightly down stairs; and, gently opening the parlor door, she peered into the room saying, softly, "May I come in now?"

"Yes, indeed," was the ready reply. "But where have you been so long?"

"Up-stairs, trying to make myself more useful than I could possibly have been here," was Annetta's playful answer.

Isabel smiled consciously. "You have been reading to mamma, I know," said she.

"Yes; until quite late," replied Annetta. And, seating herself by the window, she drew back the curtains to admit the light of the moon, and proceeded to give Isabel an account of their father's words and actions, from which they drew their own hopeful conclusions, each rejoicing with the other over that one little ray of sunlight, shining for a moment from out that darkened mind.

"O," said Isabel, "how glad I am, darling, that I may bear with me this sweet hope when far away! and then it will serve to comfort you in my absence."

"Let us not talk now of your absence, dear; I don't like to think of it. And, besides, you will not go for some time yet."

"I may be called upon to go sooner than we expected, darling. But, as it is as yet undecided, we will not let the thought cloud our present enjoyment of each other's company."

"Did William see Eugene to-day?" asked Annetta.

"Yes; he went to the office this morning," replied Isabel, dropping her eyes, and smiling softly to herself.

"And he consented, of course, since mamma has done so," continued Annetta.

"Let this little token testify as to the approbation of all parties," replied Isabel, slipping her hand into Annetta's.

"This is a sufficient answer," said Annetta, looking down upon the plain gold ring glittering in the moonlight.

"See," said Isabel; and, removing the golden circle, she handed it to Annetta, pointing, as she did so, to the names engraven inside. There she read these words:

"William to Isabel, December 23, 18—."

Tears filled Annetta's eyes as she looked up again, saying: "Now I know, beyond a doubt, that I shall lose my sister."

"Not so, my darling; rather say you will gain a brother," was Isabel's quick reply. "And, besides, I shall not be far away, you know, and expect that I shall be among you every day; and, be assured, dear, I can never, for a moment, cease to take the same interest in you, and in my dear parents and home, as heretofore. Believe me, there shall be no real separation, after all, except for the short time spent with William's friends; and, even then, we can still be one in heart, and will write daily."

"I know it, dear, and am glad there will be no great gulf between us. William will not rob us of your love, I am sure. Tell him he must be satisfied with the share allotted to him, and can not be permitted to interfere with our portion."

"Never fear, Annetta. He will add his own to mine. You will all be dear to him for my sake."

"But what says Eugene to all this?"

"That he shall be glad to call William Howard a brother, and that he is willing to trust the happiness of his sister in his keeping," was the proud response.

"Then, surely, we need not fear for your future, sister dear; for Eugene knows him so well."

"He does, indeed, having been for years intimately associated with him at college. And the attachment existing between them then, became still stronger while traveling for six months in each other's company."

"I believe him to be worthy of you, dear, and I am sure that is saying much for him. Indeed, it is paying him the highest tribute of praise which it is possible for your little sister to render."

"For which my heart thanks you truly," responded Isabel. "And, indeed," added she, "I want you to love him, Annetta, for his own sake, as well as mine."

"For yours first, his own afterward," replied Annetta, smiling archly. "I have just confessed my belief in his goodness and worth, you know; but I must learn to forgive him for taking you from me, before I can find place for him in my own heart," she added.

"You were always quick to forgive. I think I may trust you now. Indeed, Nettie, he is so good, one can not help loving him."

"Ah, my dear, that is *your* experience, not *mine*," said Annetta, playfully.

We have now learned that a great change had come upon Isabel's life. No longer was it bounded by home loves and home duties only.

Her heart, which had ever seemed so full, found room enough still for another; that other opening up a spring of joy and deep, abiding happiness therein, such as she had never known. William Howard, the gentleman to whom Isabel was betrothed, had long been one of Eugene's truest and dearest friends. An attachment had sprung up between them based upon the mutual respect and esteem with which each regarded the other, during the days of their association at college. He had made one of the party with whom Eugene was traveling at the time of his sudden summons home in consequence of his father's misfortunes. We have already seen how he refused to leave Eugene to retrace his steps in loneliness and sorrow, preferring to give up his own prospects of an enjoyable trip to the many scenes of interest they had so often talked of together, for the sake of accompanying his friend back to the house of mourning. The intimacy had always been kept up; and in Eugene's home there was ever a welcome for his friends, of whom William Howard was chief. Isabel's beauty and grace could not fail to attract the attention of the young man, while her many virtues and noble traits of character soon won their way to his heart. Having his own way to make in the world, he resolved to go boldly to work, carving

out a place and position, not only for himself, but for her. Guarding carefully the precious secret of his love, he watched and waited until he felt that he might at last ask the fair keeper of his heart to share with him the little with which his efforts, thus far, had been crowned, trusting to the future for an increase of the store.

"I do not come boasting of wealth and honors," said he; "but O, Isabel, if the love of a heart that for years has longed for this hour, if the affection which, day after day, has been steadily gathering strength, is of worth to you now, how sweet will be the recompense for all these years of watching and waiting!"

From the depths of her own strong, loving heart rose up a kindred feeling which went forth to meet his own. Tenderly did every word vibrate o'er the chords which echoed a soft response to their thrilling touch. He told her then how often he had yearned to share the burdens beneath which he saw she tottered feebly onward, or, better still, said he, lift them forever from the shoulders that were not strong enough to support their weight. Isabel's delicate constitution had, indeed, often threatened seriously to retaliate for the slights put upon it.

Going about hither and yon, from house to house, throughout the city, upon her rounds of

teaching, had been too much for her to endure so long and so unceasingly; and the signs of weakness and increasing debility, now so apparent to every eye, proved how her strength had been overtaxed, and how greatly she needed rest; and now, urged by her lover and friends at home, the lessons were given up, the old life was renounced, and happy in the enjoyment of the great blessing vouchsafed to her—"a good man's love"—she looked forward to a life of greater peace and joy than she had ventured to hope would ever again be hers. And yet, amid the peace and new-found happiness which shed their luster over her present life, one anxiety oppressed her still; over her bright hopes one cloud yet remained to cast a darkening shadow—her parents. How could she go from them? how could she be happy, indeed, while all life's sweetest joys were denied to them? Mrs. Brasure read her thoughts, and, calling her to her side one morning, spoke of the coming separation.

"I shall miss you daily, hourly, dear daughter," she said; "but I dare not indulge a thought of my own loss. You have been a good child always, my darling, and a devoted daughter to your parents. You richly deserve this recompense at last. It would ill become me to be so selfish now as to think for a moment of myself.

Let not a thought of this kind disturb your peace. Be happy, and may God watch over and keep you, wherever your future lot may be cast!"

"Dear, dear mamma, we are in His keeping now and ever; and may he comfort and bless my dear parents with His own infinite love!" exclaimed Isabel, warmly.

Eugene's business had prospered, and the additional mites which Isabel had been in the habit of casting into the family treasury were no longer essential. She had often felt it a great comfort to know she was aiding her brother in their mutual undertaking, and while it pained Eugene to recognize the need of such aid, he could not but admire the spirit which prompted it; and now they rejoiced together over the success which had attended their steps.

"How much I owe to you, my brave sister," said Eugene, one evening, as they sat in their cozy library, reviewing the ground over which they had passed together.

"On the contrary, my modest brother, the indebtedness is all my own," said Isabel.

"I can not regard it in that light," replied he; "for, aside from the pecuniary aid, which has helped greatly in procuring comforts for our dear parents, I have derived individual benefits."

"When and how? I am curious to know!" cried Isabel, in surprise.

"You ask *when*," said Eugene. "I reply, so often that the different times could not now be enumerated. You want, also, to know *how* I derived these benefits; and I answer, simply by taking pattern from your own brave spirit and unfailing courage, and, above all, your hopefulness. How many, many times have these served as an inspiration for me, infusing into my own heart new strength and energy. Can you wonder now that I say I owe so much to you?"

"And I, in turn, have attributed much of my own success to my good brother's example," replied Isabel, smiling. "The courage and persevering energy with which you undertook and fulfilled your many arduous tasks, proved an incentive to labor for me. Indeed, it was this, together with the desire to share your burdens, perchance lighten them a little, that first led me to make an effort to be useful."

"Then, it seems we have been a benefit to each other," said Eugene.

"Yes: it has been a mutual affair altogether, and shows how much one may help another, without being really conscious of the fact."

"And I, in the mean time, have been but a drone in the hive," said Annetta, thoughtfully.

"Annetta, child, of what are you dreaming?" cried Eugene.

"I dreaming, brother? By no means. I am fully conscious of all I said, and painfully alive to a knowledge of my own weakness and uselessness in the great field of labor of which you and Isabel have formed a part."

"There is a diversity of gifts, my sister. You are no more fitted to enter the arena in which I have toiled than I would have been to have guided our father's tottering steps, and watched for opportunities for pleasing and interesting his feeble mind; or, more difficult still, to have ministered, with all your tact and tenderness, to our mother's needs. Believe me, dear, of all the duties assigned to us, none have been so arduous, or so well and faithfully performed, as those which have been accomplished by our little Annetta." And Eugene drew the tearful doubter to his side, looking smilingly into the face, which wore a grieved expression.

"Yes," said Isabel, "Annetta has been an active little pattern for us all. Indeed, I'm not sure, Eugene, but that we have both drawn our inspiration from her, after all. She worked for the good of others long before our own labors began."

"True: her work took form and shape while

but a little child, widening and deepening till its influence overshadowed all within its bounds. Our Annetta has obeyed the injunction, 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.'" And again Eugene looked fondly upon the sister beside him.

"But it has been such a little, my work seems to have been like a very small stream, which has to travel a long, long distance before it joins its tiny waters to the great basin which bears upon its bosom the vessels going to and fro in the service of the country, doing something to benefit the nations of the earth."

"Not so, little sister," replied Isabel. "There's many a little stream which never reaches the great ocean, yet not idle, stagnant, or useless."

"Yes," replied Eugene; "it is little things, after all, which make up the sum of life's total. Within the very center of our home was needed a ministering angel; and such has been your work, little sister—the grand main-spring, after all, which has kept all else in motion."





CHAPTER XI.



It is a bright Spring morning. The snows of Winter have yielded to the balmy breath of Spring. The frozen earth has grown moist and green again, and the trees are putting forth their tender leaves once more; and the air resounds with the notes of the birds, returning from their far-off Winter-quarters, taking up their accustomed places amid the branches of the old trees, which so oft have echoed their joyous carols.

Isabel Brasure stood by her window, gazing with interest upon the scenes without, seeking, the while, to conquer the feelings of sadness within.

"A few more hours," said she, "and I shall be far away. And when, ah, when, shall I return?" And the tears drop slowly, one by one, from the eyes that should be bright and joyous, this fair morning, as nature herself.

Quietly Annetta entered, and approached her sister.

"What, tears on your wedding-day!" she cried, throwing her arms about her, raising tenderly the drooping head, saying, cheerfully: "Why, Isabel, I am ashamed of you. What do you suppose your liege-lord and master will say to this absurdity?"

"O, Nettie! It pains me so to leave you all!"

"This will never do," replied Annetta, energetically. "One would suppose you were forced to marry William Howard entirely against your will. Surely you do not repent your choice?"

"O, Annetta, how can you?" and the tearful eyes were raised, with a reproachful look.

"Then, do n't lead me to suppose such a thing possible by your behavior. I do n't know, indeed, but that William would ask that very question himself, should he see such a pair of red, tear-swollen eyes as are now exhibited to my gaze." And, with a laugh and playful reminder that tearful brides were quite out of date, she kissed her tenderly, and hastily left the room.

With a rapid step she proceeded at once to the library. Locking the door, she threw herself upon the lounge, and gave way to a torrent of tears. Her forced cheerfulness was gone, her playfulness forgotten, and alone she lay there, now grieving over the loss of the dear sister, her beloved daily companion, the sharer of all

her joys and sorrows. The future stretched itself out before her, blank, cold, and cheerless; and she felt now that she had no strength to go forward, bereft of Isabel's encouraging words and approving smiles. Suddenly her mother's voice was heard calling her name. She sprang up exclaiming: "How selfish! Why should I give way, while poor mamma is bearing nobly up under burdens greater than mine? I meant to be so brave, so cheerful, for her sake; and here am I, the first to sink. What a failure!" And, resolving to atone, she hastily obeyed her mother's call.

Entering the room, she sought to conceal her emotion; but the quick eye of her mother detected traces of her grief. Extending her arms, she took the poor girl to her heart, exclaiming: "It is but natural, dear. Don't try to check your feelings. We are giving away a great treasure to-day. Another link will be missing now."

Annetta knew she was thinking, then, of Henry, who was the first to break asunder the strong chain which had so closely bound the family together. For a few moments they wept in each other's arms, then went silently about the few remaining preparations for the event of the day. Isabel understood Annetta's manner, and, hastily wiping away her tears, she resolved

to profit by the lesson she had given with so much tact.

“Dear child,” said she; “I am sure she left me in such haste just because she could not keep back her own tears. She sought to arouse and cheer me while in sadness and sorrow herself; and why should I grieve her by my weakness now?”

The parting was of a more serious nature than had been anticipated when the marriage was first talked of. At that time they proposed going a short distance to visit the bridegroom’s friends, after which they expected to return and take up their residence in the city; and Isabel was rejoicing in the thought that every day or two she would still see her loved ones. But a great change had come upon their prospects. The business in which William Howard was engaged had increased to such an extent within a few years, that branch-houses had been established in various places, one of which was located in Calcutta.

The gentleman who had taken charge of this post had been compelled to resign his position in consequence of impaired health. It was necessary to supply his place at once, and the charge could only be given into the hands of a trusty, energetic man, thoroughly posted in the busi-

ness; and William Howard was selected as the proper person. Long he hesitated, not upon his own account. He was ready to go wherever he was most needed; but how could he leave Isabel? To this his heart refused to yield willing consent; for had he not already waited year after year, hoping that each day brought him nearer the treasure he longed to call his own? And now must he go, leaving that coveted treasure for another weary year? or should he take her from the hearts that would grieve so sorely to give her up? His employers urged him to accept the trust, offering a still greater increase of salary. At last the whole matter was laid unreservedly before Mrs. Brasure and Eugene. At first both were painfully surprised, and were uncertain what it was best to say or do. The mother's heart sank at the thought of parting for a year, possibly a longer time, with her beloved daughter; but, conquering her own feelings, at last she said:

“William, we have no right to control your future. If you go alone, Isabel will continually mourn your absence, and it would grieve me to see her unhappy. You will both feel keenly the long separation, for neither can be happy now without the other; it is but natural. The year will soon pass. Promise me you will bring her back at its

close, if at all possible, and I will not withhold my consent."

Eugene's feelings coincided with those his mother had expressed, and the desired promise was given. Isabel yielded, feeling it to be her duty now to accompany him wherever his work should call him. The hour for the ceremony arrived, and the family gathered in the little parlor. It was a very quiet wedding, and, in some respects, a sad one. The guests were few,—only good Doctor Grey and his wife, a pleasant-faced old lady, dressed with Quaker-like simplicity and neatness; lawyer Reed, with Mr. and Mrs. Moorely, and cousin Godfrey. Mabel, too, was there, with her husband, to whom she had been married several years. A dear little sunny-haired child clung to her dress, whom Isabel called her little namesake. Mr. Reed attended Mrs. Brasure, and Godfrey was beside poor Annetta, who trembled and looked painfully agitated, notwithstanding all her efforts to appear calm and cheerful. Eugene supported his father's steps, and led him to a quiet seat in a retired corner. Mrs. Brasure sighed as she looked over the little company assembled there, and thought how different was the scene from that which she had so often pictured for Isabel in the days of prosperity. She remembered with what pride she had thought

then of her entrance into society, and what a dazzling future she had planned for her; and she turned away to conceal her tears, saying, within her heart, "And now it all ends in a plain, quiet wedding, and a year's separation."

The bride looked very lovely in her neat, pretty traveling-dress; and the groom's fine, manly form and noble bearing appeared to great advantage. Each took upon them the holy vows with feelings of deep solemnity, and at last all was over. William Howard had won his bride, the mother had parted with her daughter, the sisters had wept out their last sobbing farewell in each other's arms, the brother had feelingly commended her to the care of an all-wise, ever watchful Father, and they were gone. The few guests departed soon after, and the family were alone.

Very quiet and lonely seemed the old house now. Eugene was in the city all day. Mr. Brasure sat quietly beside his study-table, his head usually bowed upon his hands. No change of any consequence had passed over him, save that his step grew slower and his form more bent. At times he appeared to notice that some one was missing, and would look about as if searching for a familiar face, absent now from the household band that had become so small and quiet of late. Once he looked earnestly at Isa-

bel's picture, then turned inquiringly toward Annetta for a moment, his eyes reverting back again to the picture. She tried to make him understand why Isabel was not there. He nodded his head, smiled vacantly, and resumed the old position beside the study-table; while poor Annetta sat down and cried long and bitterly, as she had often done before, over the downfall and utter ruin of all the fond hopes she had cherished for him.

"Mamma was right. My hopes all end in disappointment. Why should I ever indulge them? But O, it is so hard to realize that he will never be himself again!"

Mrs. Brasure spent the greater part of the time in her own room. She could not remain long with her husband in his quiet study. The sight of his helplessness and sad mental condition, sitting there, hour after hour, in silence, invariably sent her weeping from the room. Annetta devoted all her time and attention to her parents, and household cares. It was a very quiet life. The little parlor looked very lonely now, and Annetta rarely entered it; its silence saddened her. Her own room, too, spoke unceasingly of the absent; and the feelings which had oppressed her after Henry's departure, came back upon her with redoubled force. Time passed very slowly, it

seemed. They counted the days that must elapse before they might reasonably expect tidings from the absent. Within the mother's heart still lurked a hope of Henry's ultimate return ; and a promise had been exacted of Isabel and her husband, that they would diligently seek for him wherever they went.

"He may be in Calcutta," said she. "He had several young companions who started for that city some years ago. Do n't fail to search for my poor boy!"

And now she waited with feverish eagerness for news concerning him. At last a letter came ; a long, affectionate letter, giving full accounts of their journey and safe arrival, and closing with loving messages for all.

"No word about my boy!" murmured Mrs. Brasure, as she folded the letter, and sank back upon her couch.

"They have but just arrived, mother ; and we must give them time, you know," said Annetta, cheerfully.

"True, daughter ; we will be patient. Surely, the next will bring some news to cheer us."

"Eugene," said Annetta, one evening, "our poor mother still grieves for Henry ; her thoughts are always for the absent. It saddens me to find that I can do so little to make her happy."

"My dear little sister, it is very natural that she should think oftenest of the absent. But we will not be jealous of that."

"Jealous! O no, not for a moment. But I wish I could keep her from brooding over her troubles. She has been much less cheerful, of late, than before Isabel's marriage."

"Time will do more for her than we; but God more than all," said Eugene.

"Yes, I believe that, Eugene; and O, how I wish she trusted him as fully, and loved him as truly as you do!"

"My own heart echoes a response to that wish, my sister, and daily do I pray for this precious boon for her; and daily, faith grows stronger and clearer, and my soul rests upon the promise that whatsoever we ask in faith we shall receive. But how is it with you, Annetta dear? Is your own heart stayed upon that sure foundation, the Rock of Ages?"

"O, Eugene, that is my trouble! Sometimes I feel that my soul is indeed resting securely there, and from the precious promises I derive sweet comfort and peace; and yet there are times when I dare not so much as lift up my eyes, nor take the name of the blessed Jesus upon my lips."

"And why, Annetta? Tell me all, without reserve," said Eugene, kindly.

“Faith is so weak—so unstable. I am so easily depressed; and when moments of sadness come, I sink beneath their weight; and then comes the thought of my weakness, and I can not but bow my head in shame as I ask myself, of what use am I? Why should Christ bless and guide one who follows him with such faltering steps? and how can I hope he will even deign to own such a weak, trembling disciple?”

“This is all wrong, little sister. The promises are for the sorrowing, the weak, and the afflicted. We are to trust always; in the darkness as well as the light.”

“I know it, Eugene; and it is the thought of my oft-repeated failures in this respect that troubles me. I feel so unworthy.”

“We are all unworthy, darling. Jesus is all our righteousness. Study his character, Annetta; for he has said, ‘Come, learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your soul.’ Can you not see the true beauty of that sweet promise?”

“I see it more clearly now than ever before. O, Eugene, how you comfort me! It is that sweet true rest that I long for; my poor soul grows so weary, beating against the bars of doubt, mistrust, and depressing fears which come over me when I am lonely, sad, and weary.”

"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!" repeated Eugene, in a low tone, his kindly eyes fixed upon his sister.

"How precious is that promise!" murmured she.

"And can not my dear little sister trust such a Savior?" asked he, drawing her tenderly toward him.

"I do trust him, Eugene; I have no other hope."

"It is faith that justifies," said he.

"Yes; I am sure of that," she answered; "but why am I so weak?"

"Do you not trust too much to your own strength? Do you not, too often, forget to lean entirely upon that arm which alone can sustain you—that arm which has conquered both sin and death?"

"I fear that I do. I have need of strength from above, and a more perfect reliance upon our Father."

"We are his children, Annetta, and he is love; and will he, then, not guide us in the way that shall lead to perfect peace at last? What though the path be rough and toilsome; what though thorns are there to pierce, and clouds to darken,—shall we despair if he is near? Shall we not still hearken to his voice, and obey when

he says to us, as to the children of Israel, 'Go forward?' "

"As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people!" said Annetta, reflectively.

"Why, then, should his people ever doubt?"

"Why, indeed? O, for a faith that shall never waver!"

"Faith is the gift of God; and does he not say, 'Ask, and ye shall receive?'"

"Yes; and Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith. I will try, Eugene, to look more confidently to him. I have felt my weakness so much more since Isabel left us. Her courage helped to support and comfort me."

"God is our refuge, darling; the support and comfort which he gives can never fail. It is like 'the shadow of a great rock in a weary land,' offering shelter and rest to the poor pilgrims passing by."

"What a dear, good brother you are to me, Eugene; such a comforter and guide! You will pray every day, won't you, for your little sister?"

"I never fail to do that, dear; and I wish I had more power to help and comfort you always. In our prayers we will always remember each other, and all that we love, when we come before the Throne of grace."



CHAPTER XII.

“**G**OOD morning, Annetta,” exclaimed Godfrey Moorely, entering the sitting-room, unannounced, early one morning in October.

“Why, cousin Godfrey, how you surprised me!” said Annetta, rising to extend a welcoming hand to her visitor.

“You did n’t expect company quite so early in the day, I am sure; but I didn’t come to breakfast, cousin,” said he, smilingly, accepting the chair she offered.

“You would have been very welcome if you had. I hope you have no doubt of that fact.”

“None whatever; but I am going to surprise you still more. Where is Aunt Maria?”

“She has not yet left her room. She has so little strength at best, that she seldom comes down very early; and, even then, is obliged to lie down during the day.”

“And Eugene—has he gone yet?”

“O, yes; some time ago. He always starts for

his office at an early hour. But what is the surprise you speak of? I am a little curious to know."

"Ah, then, Miss Curiosity, I feel greatly inclined to keep you in the dark till aunty comes down."

"In that case, I shall at once inform her of your arrival, and assist in her toilet in order that she may make her appearance forthwith." And, laughingly, she left the room.

Godfrey was not left long alone; for she soon returned, accompanied by her mother.

"Good morning, aunty," said Godfrey; and, rising, he advanced to meet her, and conducted her to an easy-chair beside the window, saying, "I had hoped to find you much better and stronger now, since the prostrating heat of Summer has given place to the cool breezes of Autumn again."

"I am getting along very nicely, Godfrey, under the watchful care of my faithful little nurse."

"But where is Mrs. Price, the nurse whom Dr. Grey installed some time ago?"

"She was with us nearly a year. Sickness in her own family called her away for a time, and I have not really needed her since. Indeed, the greater part of the time she was nurse in name only, for Annetta was always at hand to attend

in person to all our wants." And she looked fondly upon the downcast face of her daughter. "But what news from home?" she asked, turning again to Godfrey.

"They are all well, and send kindest regards to you all. Mabel is home on a visit, and will come to see you herself before she returns to her own home in B——. But when did you hear last from Isabel?"

"We received a letter only yesterday. They have now been in Calcutta nearly six long months; and the dear girl is quite homesick, and yearns for a sight of the home faces once more. William thinks he can arrange his affairs to come home early in the Spring, and we are all looking forward with delight to the reunion in prospect."

"And I, in all probability, shall be far away at that time," said Godfrey.

"You! Why, where do you propose going, Godfrey?" asked Mrs. Brasure, in surprise, while Annetta sat staring with wide-open eyes.

"Did I not say, cousin, that I should surprise you?"

"Yes; but I did not suppose it was any thing of that kind. I fancied we were going to have another wedding," said Annetta, archly.

"And was waiting impatiently for an invitation, I suppose?" laughed Godfrey.

"Exactly ; and feel greatly disappointed," returned she.

"For which I am heartily sorry," he replied, bowing with mock gravity.

"But, Godfrey," said Mrs. Brasure, "you have not yet told us where you are going."

"Sure enough," said Annetta. "Do enlighten us as to what particular portion of the globe you intend directing your steps."

"I do not know that I shall remain very long in any one portion, cousin. I propose traveling through the countries of the far East in company with Mr. Reed."

Mrs. Brasure sighed, and a look of sadness passed over her face as she thought of the sudden termination of Eugene's long-talked-of journey, around which had clustered so many bright dreams and joyous anticipations.

"Mr. Reed is very anxious to visit the Holy Land ; and I, too, have long cherished the same desire," continued Godfrey.

"I am glad, my dear nephew, that you are about to enjoy this privilege, and I hope that your anticipations may meet with happier realizations than did my poor Eugene's," said Mrs. Brasure, her voice trembling as the last sentence fell from her lips.

A silence ensued, for the words recalled many

painful memories in the hearts of all present. Anxious to dispel the saddening influence which seemed casting its spell over them, Annetta was the first to speak ; and, turning to Godfrey, said, "Is not this very sudden, cousin?"

"I did not expect to go for a year or so yet, until a few days ago, and my preparations have been very hastily made."

"And when do you expect to start?"

"To-day ; and I came this morning to say farewell. Mr. Reed agreed to meet me here, as he, too, wished to see you before leaving."

In a short time Mr. Reed came in, and, after conversing a while about the expected journey, together with affairs connected more intimately with the interests of the family, from whom they were about to part, they took their leave, bearing with them many kind wishes from Mrs. Brasure and Annetta. They called to see Eugene, and spent a pleasant hour in his private office. If the proposed trip awakened old memories and revived the bright dreams and hopes of other days, if the old longings came back to Eugene then, he silently conquered them all, nobly thrusting them back, placing duty and filial affection in advance of all else. He accompanied them to the steamer, remaining till the last signal for departure was given.

"Farewell!" cried he. "May God grant you a prosperous voyage and a safe return!"

Slowly and thoughtfully he walked back to his office, striving to overcome the feeling of loneliness which crept over him.

"How much I shall miss Mr. Reed!" thought he. "He has been such a kind, true friend to me. To whom shall I go now for counsel and encouragement?" Deep within his heart a still small voice whispered the response, "To our Father."

"Yes," said Eugene; "a present help in every time of need."

Arriving at the office again, he found Doctor Grey awaiting his return. After exchanging the usual salutations, he acquainted the doctor of the departure of his friends.

"Glad to hear it; wish you were going along," said the doctor. "There's nothing like cutting loose from the old tread-mill of this busy life, and forgetting the duties and cares of our work-a-day world—growing young and fresh and active through the influence of a little wholesome freedom."

Eugene sighed, involuntarily, as he thought how difficult it was to turn aside from the strong current ever sweeping onward and onward, bearing upon its strong bosom many a weary one,

who would gladly pause for a little while at least, to enjoy a taste of that rest and freedom of which the good doctor spoke.

"Never mind, my young friend," said the doctor, as if reading his thoughts. "'All's well that ends well;' let us hope 'there's a good time coming.' I just dropped in to ask for the latest news concerning Isabel and her husband, not having time this morning to drive out to your home."

Receiving a good account of the absent ones, the worthy doctor turned to go. Eugene accompanied him to the buggy. As he took up the reins, he turned back to say, in his kind fatherly way:

"By the way, Eugene, don't confine yourself too closely in that office. I protest against your spending ten hours a day over those musty old books. If I had n't such a list of professional calls to make this morning, I should shorten the time by two hours at least. I'll be along to-morrow, most likely, for that very purpose."

"You are very kind, Doctor, and thoughtful as ever. How shall I ever repay you?" said Eugene.

"Tut, tut, young man, that's my look out. It's my business to look after you, and my pleasure; so don't interfere. I think we shall have a shower to-day, and a drive into the country will be pleas-

ant and refreshing. Tell Annetta I will stop for her this evening, if I can get through my round of visits in time. There's a great deal of sickness in the city just now; take care of yourself, Eugene. Good morning;" and, with a pleasant nod, he drove away.

"That's one good friend left, at any rate," said Eugene. "How naturally the heart clings to those who have known and loved us through all the vicissitudes of this changeful life! They seem like those of one's own household, and, as such, command a deeper respect and warmer love than the friends of to-day. At least, such is my own experience; for to none can I turn with such feelings of confidence and trust and real boyish dependence as to Doctor Grey and Mr. Reed. As for the ten hour's work to which the considerate doctor objects, I don't see how it can be avoided, especially just now, for we are very busy. Well, well: perhaps there may be a good time coming, after all; we can not tell, at present. Like my faithful little sister, Annetta, I must obey the voice of duty, and

"Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.'"

Letters came frequently from Isabel and her husband, each containing glowing accounts of the life of usefulness which they had been trying to

lead while so far away from the dear friends at home. To Eugene and Annetta these tidings were particularly gratifying. They rejoiced to know that, though strangers in a strange land, they still found a way to serve the blessed Master, and improve the talents which He had given them; and very often did Annetta receive comfort and strength from the little white-winged messengers wafted from Isabel's distant home. And O, how many, many prayers ascended on high from the heart of each for the other! for, though separated, they still knelt in supplication to the same God who watched over all. "She comforts and helps me still," said Annetta. "Dear Isabel, how I long to see her once more!"

Mrs. Brasure had been waiting long and anxiously for some information concerning her son; but vain were her hopes and expectations. After long and fruitless search, Isabel was obliged to write that no traces whatever could be found in Calcutta. So eagerly had the patient mother waited for his return, so anxiously and hopefully had she yearned for his presence, day after day, month after month, till these had merged themselves into years, she could not even now resign the hope, without which she felt she must sink in despair. The Winter had passed, Spring had come again, and Isabel had been gone a

year; and now the family were looking forward to the promised reunion. To Isabel the time had seemed very long, and she yearned for the sound of the voices she loved, and rejoiced in the thought of soon seeing, once more, the faces so indelibly stamped upon her heart. With a glad smile, she sat down one morning to write them the news over which she was already rejoicing herself, telling them they would leave Calcutta the day following that upon which the letter was written.

“Going home!” said she. “O, Will, how sweetly those words come to me now; how full of deep precious meaning!”

“They are indeed, dear wife; and I am thankful that I have been able to keep the promise I made to your mother and Eugene, when they consented to give me the priceless treasure I asked at their hands. You have borne the separation nobly, Belle, and I am proud of you.”

The remaining preparations were completed, and they bade adieu to the few friends they had gathered about them, and started for the dear old home. A young man connected with the firm by which William Howard had been sent to Calcutta, had business in their native city; and, by invitation of both William and Isabel, resolved to make one of their party.

"Indeed, Mr. Weber," said Isabel, "you were so kind to us, when we came as strangers to your city, we shall be very glad to make some return."

"And will try to make you feel at home among us," said William.

"Thank you kindly, my friends ; I appreciate and frankly accept your offer," said Mr. Weber. "But," continued he, "I hope you have not bid Calcutta a final adieu. Surely, after you have seen your friends and enjoyed a season of rest and recreation among them, you will resume your places here."

"That is, as yet, undecided. I am not sure that my wife will ever again be willing to give up home and its sweet associations, to follow the steps of her husband!" said William, with an arch glance at Isabel.

"I hope," said she, "that my husband believes me willing to go wherever duty calls."

"Thank you, dear Belle. I do indeed believe that those sentiments, so nobly expressed, will be carried out to the letter, if need be."

The homeward journey promised to be a pleasant one ; and, as each day drew near its close, Isabel would watch the sun disappearing from view, and, with a feeling of thankfulness, often said, "One day nearer home."

"Yes," said her husband one evening, as they



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sat upon the deck, "I wonder if this feeling is not akin to that which fills the heart of the dying Christian, longing to gain the home of the soul."

"To the tempest-tossed mariner, upon the broad ocean of life, I have no doubt the thought of that rest which remaineth for the people of God is very precious. Indeed, I think that we, in our present state, can have no idea how deep and pure and unutterable the feeling must be," said Isabel, with a thoughtful look.

"I have often tried to imagine it," replied William. "And, in speaking of our earthly homes, my thoughts frequently revert to that above; and at evening I love to repeat that sweet hymn:

‘At eve I pitch my moving tent,
A day’s march nearer home.’

It is a precious thought; and how many are, indeed, nearer that eternal home than they think! How important it is that the soul be prepared to depart at any moment, ready to obey with joy the Master’s call!"

"Even now," said William, "as I look over the side of this vessel, and see the great waves surging madly onward, leaping high in foam-crested billows, and anon sinking into the great depths again, I can not but feel what helpless creatures we are, entirely dependent upon a higher power.

See, Isabel, how the waters leap and foam ; how, like maddened creatures of life, they throng around the vessel. Ah, how many dangers surround us even now ! and my heart asks itself the solemn question : ‘Am I prepared to meet my God ?’ For, O Isabel, we ourselves may, indeed, be, this night, a day’s march nearer our heavenly home !”

“It may be so, dear husband ; we know not what a day or an hour may bring forth ; we can only trust in Him who doeth all things well.”

“And you can do this, Isabel ; you can leave all in the hands of God, waiting fearlessly the issue ?”

“I feel that I can, dear Will ; why should I not ? Why should we ever fear to trust One who is all goodness and love ?”

“But, if storms arise, if the seas threaten to overwhelm us,” questioned he, bending an earnest look upon the sweet face beside him ; “what if the powers of the great deep rise up against us ?”

For answer she feelingly repeated, in a low, soft tone, the words of a hymn she loved :

“The tempest heard his voice,
The winds obeyed his will,
The elements withheld their noise,
And all the floods were still.

Then while o’er seas we roam,
Thy goodness, Lord, we see ;

Though distant from our native home,
We are not far from thee."

"Thank God for such a sweet assurance!" said her husband. "Come what may, we are his creatures, trusting implicitly in his divine will. Do you know, dear, that to Eugene I owe a debt of gratitude a life-time can never repay?"

"Why, no, Will; he never told me of any favor he did you, nor have you ever spoken of any particular act; at least, nothing more than the ordinary deeds of kindness often shown toward each other during the days of your college life."

"I was never a very wild boy, Isabel—at least not in the common acceptation of the term—but I was a thoughtless one, easily influenced, and in a fair way to be led astray by companions more giddy, if possible, than myself. Eugene interested himself in me with all a brother's kindness. He afterward told me that, in the days of our early acquaintance, he saw much in me that needed a guiding hand; and it was through his instrumentality that I became a Christian."

"O, my husband, what a precious tribute of praise is this to my dear brother!" exclaimed Isabel.

"Yes; to him, under God, do I owe all that I am. I had looked upon religion as a some-

thing to be inquired into, and sought for at some future time, and had even regarded it as something which must necessarily throw a gloom over life, and resolved to trust to morality alone till youth gave place to the advancing steps of age; at which time I fancied I should feel more inclined to make preparation for another world.

“Ah, Isabel, how often do the young make just such a mistake, and of how much real, true happiness does the error rob them! Eugene’s cheerfulness, geniality of manner, and kindness of heart, first commanded respect and esteem. His gentleness to others, and deep, earnest piety, afterward won my heart; and with feelings of deepest interest I watched him, contrasting his daily life and deportment at school, and elsewhere, with his earnest, touching appeals, so often made to me, and I could find no inconsistencies. He lived up to the religion he professed; and I could not but see that, instead of the gloom by which I had imagined the Christian to be overshadowed, he enjoyed perfect sunshine. ‘Why, Will,’ said he to me, ‘how can one be unhappy who is at peace with God and all the world?’ The impressions made upon my heart and mind could not be effaced, and to-day I thank God for all that Eugene Brasure has been to me.”



CHAPTER XIII.

AS the vessel steadily plowed her onward way, hourly drawing nearer her destined port, her passengers eagerly waited to catch the cry which should bespeak land in the distance. In the mean time, happy hearts and willing hands were busy at home, planning, devising, and executing. Annetta and her indefatigable assistant, the faithful Martha, were here, there, and every-where. Mrs. Brasure smiled as she watched the careful preparations.

"Why, Nettie dear," said she, "you are making the poor old place look really tasteful and pretty; but I am afraid you will tire yourself out."

"No, indeed, mamma, I enjoy it; and, besides, I haven't time now to think of myself. There, see, do n't you admire that little basket?" And she pointed to the moss-covered, rustic basket in which she had been arranging a quantity of ivy and ferns.

"Beautiful!" said her mother, bending down to

note more closely the delicate beauty of the tiny sprays just peeping beyond the edge.

"I am going to hang it in Isabel's room, mamma. You know how she admires any thing which speaks of nature. Then I shall make another for the parlor; and, by the way, I must manufacture a few more of those pretty little frames for the pictures Isabel drew so long ago. I mean to surprise her. Eugene brought me a fine lot of cones for that purpose." And the busy fingers went from one employment to another, leaving traces of her neatness and skill upon every side.

Eugene had spent many an hour in the garden; and, truly, it presented an inviting appearance. Special attention had been bestowed upon Isabel's favorite flowers; and now they looked thrifty, fresh and beautiful. Even the old dog, Rover, that for so many years had been identified with the family, appeared to comprehend that something unusual was going on, and frisked about from the house to the garden and back again as if quite forgetful of his age, ignoring altogether the rug upon which he had long been in the habit of spending the greater part of the time.

One evening, Eugene came home an hour earlier than usual. Going at once to his mother's

room, where he knew he would find both mother and sister, he informed them that important business called him to a small town not far from the port for which the vessel, upon which the expected friends had taken passage, was bound.

"I think," said he, "the trip will be beneficial. Doctor Grey advises me to go by all means. Having completed my business, which will require but a few hours of my time, I can then go on and meet Isabel and Will, and return in their company."

"It will be a pleasant change for you, Eugene, and a delightful surprise to them. I, too, would advise you to go," said Mrs. Brasure.

"What says Annetta?" asked he, turning to her.

"I think, with mamma, that it would prove a very delightful surprise, indeed, to our dear sister and brother to meet at once with some one from home. I fancy now that I see Belle's eyes as she first catches sight of Eugene. But do bring them with all possible speed to us," she continued, smilingly, as she took up the work she had dropped. "And one thing more, brother," she added, as he turned to leave the room; "send down a tuner from the city early to-morrow. We must have the piano put in perfect order. O, I long to see the dear girl's fingers gliding once again over the long-silent keys!"

"Yes, indeed, we will have our family concerts again, as in the days of 'Auld Lang Syne.' Will is a fine tenor singer. I will leave word this evening with an excellent tuner, and have the instrument thoroughly repaired."

And so Eugene left on the evening train, promising to telegraph as soon as the vessel arrived and the dear ones were safe on shore. The hours passed quickly by; and the day following that upon which Eugene left them, the expected telegram was received, stating that the travelers had arrived in safety and health, and would be at home by eight o'clock that evening.

William and Isabel Howard, in company with their young friend, Lawrence Weber, stood upon the deck, seeking to catch the first sight of their native land. And when at last they were safely "anchored in the harbor," a feeling of thankfulness was mingled with their rejoicings. As they stood waiting for their turn to leave the vessel, their attention was attracted toward some one who was making signals, evidently intended for them. Upon looking more closely, Isabel clasped her hands in an ecstasy of delight as she exclaimed: "O, Will, it is Eugene! How good, how kind of him, to meet us here!"

A few moments later, and the brother and sister were clasped in a close embrace; and to

William, too, was extended a brother's warm welcome home.

Mr. Weber stood by, gazing with feelings of interest upon the touching scene.

"What a sweet welcome is this!" thought he. "No wonder Mrs. Howard has yearned for her home and her friends. What an affectionate family!"

At this moment William turned and introduced him to Eugene, who received him in a friendly, cordial manner, which at once won his esteem.

"Mrs. Howard may well be proud of her brother," said he to William. "I am really anxious now to see also the sister, of whom she speaks so often."

"Our little Annetta! Yes, she is a sister of whom Isabel is justly fond. She is worthy of all the love lavished upon her."

"So I should judge, from what your wife has told me concerning her."

"And now," said Eugene, turning to them, "our mother desired me to bring you, in all haste, to them. The next train leaves in an hour. We have but just time to reach it."

Entering a carriage in waiting, the party started at once for the depot. Procuring desirable seats, our friends were soon engaged in animated conversation. Questions innumerable were asked

and answered ; and, wholly absorbed in each other, they scarcely noted the lapse of time. Onward and onward sped the train, pausing now and then to leave or receive passengers. Onward, still onward, toward the home where the loved ones were waiting for them, counting the very moments as they passed all too slowly by.

“ Half-past seven !” said Annetta, looking up at the little French clock, which kept up its continual tick, tick, tick, regardless of the impatience of those who so closely watched it, wishing that for once that swinging pendulum would move with increased speed. “ One-half hour more, mamma ! O, that it were past !” said she.

“ It will soon be gone, daughter ; only a little patience, now !” was the mother’s smiling response.

A few moments Annetta sat watching the gathering darkness ; then busied herself in lighting up the house, till the whole cast a look of brightness out upon the night—which seemed to defy its power.

“ Only fifteen minutes now !” said she, as she ran down to the gate. Standing there a little while, she thought of the bountiful repast upon which she had exerted all her skill, aided by the willing Martha ; and, returning hastily to the house, she again repaired to the well-lighted

dining-room, and looked, for the third time at least, to see that every thing was complete.

"Are you sure there's nothing wanting, Martha? and will the coffee be just right?" she asked.

"O yes, Miss Nettie; just you rest easy, now. I'm sure every thing is in splendid order. Won't Miss Isabel be delighted, though?" and the faithful servant's eyes sparkled in anticipation of the praises she was sure of receiving from her kind young lady, as she still called her.

Eight o'clock! Annetta's heart throbbed, and her feet refused to be still. She went from her mother's chair to the window, and from the window to the lounge where her father reclined, and tried for the twentieth time to make him understand the cause of so much commotion. He looked at the lights, and smiled; and once, as Annetta knelt beside him, he stroked her hair softly, and called her "Rosebud," as he often did; for to him the past appeared nearer and more real than the present.

"Surely, he will know her when she comes! Do n't you think so, mamma?" she asked, glancing uneasily at the quiet figure lying there, so unconscious of the joy in store for them.

"I can not tell, my child; but I am afraid not. But, dear, do n't let that thought cloud your

happiness now ; it will be of no avail. Do try for once to banish it !”

“ I can not ; it is too closely woven with every thought of my heart. In every joy, every sorrow, it is ever present with me ; and it can never be otherwise. I do not expect it. Quarter after eight !” she added. “ Surely they should be here now.”

“ We must make allowance for some delay, dear,” said Mrs. Brasure.

Half-past eight ; and Annetta again stood at the gate, gazing anxiously in the direction they must come. Once, the sound of carriage wheels was heard ; she listened intently. Yes, they were approaching nearer and nearer, and now in sight ! O joy ! soon the dear sister would be in her arms. Her heart bounded, and, half unconsciously, she opened the gate and stepped out. The carriage was almost beside her now, and she looked up to catch the first loving look from Isabel’s speaking eyes. But no ; the vehicle passed on, and her eager gaze met only the surprised glance of a stranger, who leaned forward as he passed, as if wondering at the brilliantly lighted house and the white-robed figure standing there. She was sadly disappointed, and repressed with difficulty the tears which sprang to her eyes.

“ This is childish !” said she, making an effort

to conquer her restlessness. "There may have been some change made in time, or the train may have been unavoidably detained. Why can I not be more patient?" And, with slow, reluctant steps, she returned to the house, entering the parlor just as the clock struck nine. Glancing at her mother, she noticed that a look of anxiety rested upon her countenance, robbing it of the pleased expression of expectancy which it had worn all day; and as the moments dragged themselves slowly along, the expression deepened and grew more and more apparent; and, at last, unable longer to remain quiet and composed, she, too, left her seat, and stood, first at the door and then upon the porch, while poor, anxious, restless Annetta again ran down to the gate for another searching look toward the city. An hour passed on, and the suspense grew momentarily more painful.

"Surely, mamma," said Annetta, "there certainly must have been a change of time of which we have not been apprised!"

"In that case, I am sure Eugene would have telegraphed. It is not like him to leave us in suspense," replied Mrs. Brasure, with a long-drawn sigh.

Within the little parlor they still waited and watched; now at the window, now at the door

and upon the porch, and anon at the gate. The slow, even ticking of the clock alone broke the silence; for so great was the weight pressing now upon their hearts that each felt it useless to attempt to speak words of encouragement and cheer. Mr. Brasure slept quietly as a child, upon the lounge; and poor old Martha bewailed the spoiled coffee and overdone chicken, till, tired out at last, she sat dozing beside the kitchen-stove, from which the fire had long since gone out.

"O, mother!" cried Annetta, bursting into a passion of tears as the midnight chimes broke the deep silence of the night.

"We are all in the hands of God, my child. To him only can we look; to him must we trust every thing!" murmured Mrs. Brasure, passing her arm around the trembling girl.

"And he will care for his own. You believe this, dear mother?"

"I do, indeed. O, my darling, I have long watched the growth of this religion in the hearts of my children. I have noted, carefully, its effect upon the daily life of each, and, I assure you, it has not been without its effect upon me. I am weak and untaught in these matters; I have long neglected the way of life; but to Him only do I now look for strength."

"O, thank God! dear, dear mother!" exclaimed Annetta, in the fullness of her heart.

"Yes, Annetta, dear child, I do indeed thank God for having led me to himself through the instrumentality of my children."

"And, mamma," said Annetta, "it was the purity of Eugene's daily life and noble example, together with his earnest appeals, which won Isabel and me to the blessed Savior."

"My noble boy! Great will be his reward in that heavenly kingdom toward which we are all hastening," was the earnest reply, direct from the full heart of the fond mother.

The long night has at last passed away. The gray dawn of morning steals faintly, coldly over all; a dreary duskiness wraps every thing in a dull, hazy gloom. But see: the sky grows brighter now; the shadows are receding before the light of morning, which steadily advances, creeping up from the distant hills, heralding the coming of the mighty king of day.

Martha roused herself, and, looking about, was for a moment startled to find herself in the kitchen, with the untasted supper still upon the stove. Shaking off the lethargy of sleep, she rose and passed into the dining-room. There stood the well-spread table, just as Annetta's tasteful busy hands had left it, with a feeling of excusable,

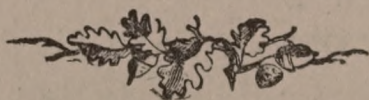
happy pride in her loving heart. The glare of the lights, mingled with the gray dreariness of morning, cast a fitful, shadowy glimmer over the scene. Quietly she extinguished the lights, and, passing into the parlor, looked startled, almost frightened, as the pale faces and anxious eyes of the sad watchers met her gaze.

"O, surely, surely, you never sat here all night, alone?" exclaimed she, raising both hands in great surprise.

"Yes, Martha; for we knew not at what moment they might come!"

With an ominous shake of the head, accompanied by a half-smothered sigh, the girl drew back the heavy curtains; and, putting out the lights here and throughout the house, she returned to the kitchen to prepare a cup of hot coffee for her mistress and poor, dear young lady.

"I'm sure," said she, "the poor girl's face is white as her dress; and as for missus herself, why she looks like the very image of despair!"





CHAPTER XIV.

WITHIN hotels, business houses, and private home circles, too, the morning papers were circulated. Careless eyes glanced over the long array of news, foreign and domestic. Here is found a notice of some vessel lost at sea, and the brief record closes with the sentence, "All on board perished." What is that to the reader? He had no loved ones there. And he turns to another topic, which relates, perchance, the incidents of some terrific explosion, attended by fearful loss of life. But why should he give it a thought, unless it be to rejoice that neither life or property, or any thing belonging to him, were in any way affected by the catastrophe? Running his eye down the column, he reads, "Shocking railroad accident," but turns carelessly from it, merely saying, perhaps, "How common these accidents are getting to be! Every day one hears of such occurrences." Ay: every day do fond hearts break, every day the wail of sorrow and woe surges up from the deep fountains of despair. What though we on

our Western shores read, unmoved, of perils and disasters befalling the people of the East. What though we note the number of lives lost by accident, be it great or small, and pause, perhaps, but to thank God that our loved ones are still safe; yet how many, many hearts are bewailing the consequences of every such disaster! Upon every vessel lost, every train wrecked, amid scenes of danger and death every-where, are those for whom some one is left to mourn. Yes; for every life thus lost a human heart somewhere is left to bleed. O, how vast the number, and how seldom we pause to think of the homes made desolate, and the hours, days, and even years of suffering every such occurrence entails upon the human family!

Upon the borders of a quiet village, some miles distant from the city, near which our friends resided, a fearful scene had been enacted upon the evening which was to have seen the long-parted loved ones reunited once more beneath the sheltering roof of home. With hearts beating high with hope and expectation, our little party, whom we accompanied to the train and saw fairly started upon the route for home, sat conversing pleasantly with each other. The other passengers were engaged, as usual, some in reading, others discussing matters of greater or less im-

portance, while a few sat apparently wrapped in thought. Onward sped the train; but suddenly a terrific crash was heard, a wild shriek followed, and at the bottom of a ravine lay a broken, shapeless mass of timber, among which was buried a precious freight of human beings. O, the sad echoings of moans, cries, and piteous entreaties which fall upon our ears! O, the fearful horrors of the scene! Would that we might shut it forever from our gaze! After what seemed an interminable delay, the villagers came flocking from all directions, and every possible effort was made for relieving the sufferers.

From beneath the *débris* helping hands drew forth the crushed, crippled, and disabled passengers. Alas! from how many poor wounded bodies the life had been thus suddenly and fearfully crushed out! How many hearts were stilled forever, how many souls had flown to the God who gave them! Stunned and bruised, but not seriously wounded, Lawrence Weber was drawn from his perilous position beneath the wreck. Regaining his shattered senses, his first act was to search for his friends. But, for some time, he could discover no trace of them amid the confusion and distress by which he found himself surrounded upon every side. At last, however, as a portion of the wreck was removed, his eyes

fell upon the ghastly faces of William and Isabel. In an instant he was beside them, calling each by name; but to his cries there came no response; for the voices of both were hushed forever, and upon the pale brows was placed the icy seal of death.

Sadly the blow fell upon the heart of Lawrence Weber; for, during their residence in Calcutta, he had come to look upon them as friends in every sense of the word, and the feeling deepened and grew stronger with each passing day. That last conversation upon the deck of the vessel came back forcibly upon him now, and again he seemed to hear Isabel's voice as she said: "How many are nearer that eternal home than they think! How important it is that the soul be prepared to depart at any moment, ready to obey with joy the Master's call!"

With the assistance of some of the villagers, he removed the cold forms of his friends from the wreck, and continued his search for Eugene, the kind brother who had so joyously come to meet the returning sister—him whom he had known but a few hours, yet loved already. When found at last, to Lawrence Weber's intense joy, he was still alive; and, with the tender solicitude of a brother indeed, he had him carefully removed to a farm-house near by. And, hour after

hour, while the mother and sister watched and waited at home, he kept his anxious, untiring vigil in that lowly room. Just at midnight, Eugene motioned him to come nearer. He bent down to catch the whispered words, and the first inquiry was for Isabel. Lawrence was silent; for how could he answer? how could he frame the reply which would, perchance, sever his faint hold upon life?

"Tell me," urged Eugene, "where are they? Do not fear to speak. Are they suffering?" And his eyes wore an eager, wistful look.

"No," said Lawrence; "they are at rest."

A convulsive shiver passed over his frame, the wistful expression faded from his eyes.

"At rest!" he murmured, after a moment's silence. At rest; ay, at home with God—a precious home, where there shall be no more partings. "You knew them and you loved them, I am sure," added he, taking Lawrence's hand in his.

"I did; I did most truly," said Lawrence, with emotion.

"Then go to our home, dear friend. Go to our stricken loved ones. Tell them we are all at rest, and will wait for them in that brighter, happier home, where 'God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes, and there shall be no more

death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away.' ”

“But, surely, Eugene, you will not die. You are not mortally wounded. O, Eugene, dear friend, live; live, for the sake of those who love you.”

“The Master calls. I must obey. The only pang in death is in leaving those for whom I have toiled and cared for years. O, that I might look once more upon their dear faces, and hear once again the voices I love! They are alone now, and destitute. How can I leave them to struggle on, unaided, against the adversities which may come upon them? O God, help! Lord strengthen!”

There was agony in that brief prayer! but the answer came, swift and sure. A smile hovered over the pale face, the tightly clasped hands relaxed, and were placed gently upon Lawrence's bowed head, and, in a low voice, he said: “He does help, blessed Savior; a present help in every time of need. ‘Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.’ ”

A little while he lay in silence, evidently suffering greatly. His eyes were closed, and his pallid lips moved as if in prayer. A physician entered, and, after noting the tokens of failing

strength, and the accompanying symptoms of approaching death, left a few directions with Lawrence, adding, "A few hours, at most, is all that is left him of life."

"Of this life," murmured Eugene, slowly. "But there is a life beyond, which is eternal."

"If you have any directions to leave, my young friend, it will be best to attend to it at once," said the physician, as he turned to leave the room.

"I leave all in the hands of my God," said Eugene.

"How peacefully Christians die!" thought the physician, as he hurried away to minister to the wants of others needing his care.

"Are you suffering now, dear friend?" inquired Lawrence, bending kindly over the dying man.

"Yes, yes; but the love of Christ sustains me. I am almost home! almost home!"

"And you do not shrink back from the cold river? You do not fear to go?" questioned Lawrence, a feeling of awe stealing over him.

"O no; I have no fear; Jesus is with me; and with the Psalmist I can say, 'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.' Lawrence, I rejoice to go. My only sorrow is for those I leave, but God will provide, Jesus will sustain.

I long for rest. Bear my last message to them, Lawrence. Don't forget. Tell them we are waiting, we are——." A look of intense pain passed over his features. "Lord Jesus, come quickly," he whispered; and the soul of Eugene Brasure left its frail tenement. He was at rest. No more suffering, no more toil or sorrow. Before the great White Throne he was singing the glorious song of redemption. . . .

'Tis evening again. The moon looks down upon the scenes of earth, and the stars shine as of old; but gone is their power to cheer and illumine. How much misery, how much deep, unutterable sorrow, do they look upon now! 'Tis always so, indeed; for from every part of the earth ascend sounds of woe, mingled with prayers and entreaties, though we, in our own gladness and prosperity, may know it not.

"The deathless
Sandalaphon stands listening breathless
To sounds that ascend from below;
From the spirits on earth that adore,
From the souls that entreat and implore
In the fervor and passion of prayer.
From the hearts that are broken with losses;
And weary with dragging the crosses
Too heavy for mortals to bear."

Within that lonely home, upon the suburbs of the great city, no lights were flashing now, no glad hearts were there waiting to welcome the

absent, no happy voices singing fragments of joyous songs. All was still and dark and dreary; for, in the silent parlor, three cold forms lay shrouded for the grave; and, within the darkened chamber above, a grief-stricken mother lay moaning upon her bed, refusing, like Rachel of old, "to be comforted, because her children were not." Beside her, with pale face and quivering lips, knelt the devoted daughter, the patient, long-tried Annetta. O, it was a pitiful sight—one from which we turn sadly away!

The presence of such terrible sorrow in the house seemed to have again aroused Mr. Brasure. He looked wistfully upon the still, calm faces of the dead; and, going from the silent parlor up to his wife's room, he would stand by her bed, as if longing to comfort her, yet conscious of his utter inability to do so. To Annetta he was very gentle, and often child-like. Forsaking the old position beside the study-table, he wandered restlessly about from room to room, as if still searching for something—"something which he could not find."

To Lawrence Weber it was a hard task to bear the sad tidings to that once happy family. Ay: it was hard, indeed, to speak the words which would bring such crushing sorrow upon those who so tenderly loved the dear ones gone

before. How he longed to comfort them, how his kind heart yearned to sympathize with them in this terrible bereavement! But, though he had so often heard of them that they did not now seem as strangers to him, yet he felt that, to them, he was a stranger still, whose presence might seem an intrusion.

The last sad rites for the dead have been performed; and she who, but a year ago, went from that home a happy bride, now sleeps in the quiet grave. Beside her, wrapped in the same dreamless slumber, lies her husband. Truly may it be said of them, "They were one in life, and in death were not divided." And here, too, rests the noble Christian brother—he who had ever lived a life of true piety worthy the imitation of all by whom he was surrounded, enjoying the love of God himself, and leading others to drink from the same pure, inexhaustible fountain. O, what hallowed memories clustered about those three new-made graves!

Day after day passed slowly, sadly away, and still Mrs. Brasure lay in the same despairing grief from which Annetta had vainly sought to rouse her. Mr. Weber had called frequently; but she had been too ill to see him. To Annetta he had delivered Eugene's dying message, expressing, at the same time, the deep sympathy which

he felt for them, and his readiness to do any thing in his power to aid or comfort them. She thanked him through her tears for all his kindness, and begged him to come again when her mother would be able to add her own acknowledgments to hers.

"I ask no thanks, Miss Brasure ; indeed, it pains me to receive them. I only want to be considered in the light of William's friend and your own, ready to do any thing for you."

"I appreciate your kindness. It is very acceptable in this hour of trouble ; for I know you loved them too." And the tears flowed freely as she thought of that homeward journey and the many pleasant hours he had spent in their company.

One morning, a few days after, she came to her mother's side, and, bending over her, gently said, "Dear mamma, wouldn't you like to have me read to you now?"

There was no answer save a low, gasping sigh.

"See, mamma," continued she, anxious to rouse her from her despair ; "see, it is Eugene's Bible, with all the precious promises marked by his own hand !"

The mother took the volume from her daughter's hand, and, turning the leaves slowly, gazed tearfully upon the penciled passages. Handing it back to Annetta, she said :

“Yes, dear. Read something he has marked; it will seem like a message from my dear boy, leading my thoughts from self up to Him in whom I fain would trust now and always.”

In a touching manner, Annetta read many sweet passages, which did indeed appear like a voice from the better land, to the poor mother's sinking heart. She kept the precious volume beneath her pillow, often drawing it forth to peruse the same blessed promises over and over again; every word seemed so perfectly adapted to her needs.

“O, how it comforts me!” said she. “My dear boy; how he loved this book! how faithfully he kept its sayings in his heart, and how nobly he followed its precepts!”

One still, beautiful evening, while her mother slept, Annetta went to visit the three graves in the quiet cemetery. It was but a short distance from her home, and often was she found there at the twilight hour, when she could leave her mother for a little while resting alone. As she sat there, thinking of the past, a sense of utter loneliness came over her. She felt weak and helpless, and yearned—O so earnestly!—for Eugene's strong arm to lean upon, and for Isabel's words of encouragement and cheer.

“They have finished their work, and have

entered upon their reward!" she said, "while I am left to toil on wearily and alone, till my summons shall come. My work is not yet finished; my life not yet complete. O, for strength to go bravely on! O, for power to soothe and comfort those still left to my care! May I be a blessing to them! But O, it is so lonely there now, so dreary and still; and my heart yearns so unceasingly for these beloved sleepers!" and bowing her head upon the mound which covered the cold form of Isabel, she wept long and bitterly.

Suddenly she was startled by a light step, and raising her head, met the sympathetic gaze of Lawrence Weber. Quietly he sat down beside her, waiting till her grief subsided; then, as the sobs gradually grew fainter and lower, he took her trembling hand in his, saying gently:

"Do not consider me an intruder, my dear young friend. Believe me, I only want to help and comfort you."

"I feel it, Mr. Weber, and do appreciate all your kindness; and my heart thanks you truly," she answered, raising her expressive dark eyes to his.

Sitting there in the dim twilight, he told her many incidents connected with the life of Isabel and her husband while in Calcutta. He repeated, too, the conversation upon the deck that night,

when both expressed their willingness to go whenever their summons should come. It was a comfort to Annetta to hear this from the lips of one who had been so intimately connected with them. And then he told her how peacefully, and even happily, Eugene had breathed his life away, murmuring with his latest breath, "Lord Jesus, come quickly!"

"O!" said he, "to me death has always seemed so terrible; but to him there was no terror, no shrinking back. It is a blessed thing to see a Christian die, and I have never ceased, since that hour, to wish I too was a follower of Christ."

"*'I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life,'*" repeated Annetta. She loved that passage; Eugene had loved it too. It was so full of comfort, and now seemed doubly precious and consoling to her.

"But I am weak and sinful and untaught. I know not the way," said her companion.

"Christ himself points out the way," said Annetta; "for it is written, *'I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.'*"

"Your faith is strong," said he; "you believe so implicitly."

"Why should we not believe? For God's

promises are immutable ; ‘ If ye abide in me, and I in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done.’ ”

“ Your words are comforting,” said he ; “ and I hope to resume this conversation at no distant day, for I am sadly in need of both comfort and instruction. But the night-air grows colder, and it is not safe to remain longer here.” And drawing her hand within his arm, they walked slowly homeward.

Many such meetings took place at that sacred spot, and often did Mr. Weber lead the conversation to such topics as the one just recorded ; for the young girl’s faith and confidence inspired him with kindred feelings.

One evening, he told her that the business which had been the means of bringing him to the city, required that he should also go farther west, and that he would probably be absent several weeks, but would see her again upon his return. She missed him at first, for her life was a quiet one, often very lonely ; but after the lapse of a few days, her whole time and attention were devoted to the mother, who was evidently failing fast. The poor, weary heart had struggled against so many crushing sorrows, the worn-out frame was so weak and powerless now, nothing seemed left her but to depart and be at rest.

"I know that my days are numbered, darling!" she said. "I shall soon sleep in peace beside my children. But O, Annetta, it grieves me to leave you so lonely and sad. Don't, darling; don't," she added, as the poor girl gave vent to an uncontrollable burst of sorrow. "God will strengthen you; he will sustain you. Look to him for comfort when I am gone."

Her voice died away in a faint whisper; but Annetta wept on, her head bent down upon the bed, close beside her mother. Gently the thin white hand stroked her soft hair till her grief had spent itself. Annetta realized now that soon she would be motherless; soon another treasure would be gone from her clasp, and life grow darker and darker for her. Daily she saw the dear eyes losing their luster, and the cheek grow more wan and colorless; the thin hand had scarcely strength now to lift itself in blessings upon her head.

One dreary Autumn day, she sat reading Eugene's Bible. Cold blew the wind without, and the dull, ceaseless patter of the rain fell with a sad monotony upon her ears. Toward evening the storm increased; the pitiless wind wailed wildly around the house; the rain fell in torrents, and the night was dismal beyond description. As Annetta stood at the window, looking



READING EUGENE'S BIBLE.

out into the murky darkness beyond, almost unconsciously she murmured :

“The sky is changed ; and such a change ! O night,
And storm, and darkness, ye are wondrous strong !”

Turning from the window, she sat down beside the bed, watching with patient, loving eyes, the dear invalid who was sleeping quietly. Hour after hour passed, and still she kept her place. It was a lonely vigil, but the devoted daughter had known many such. At midnight the sleeper awoke.

“O, I’ve had such sweet dreams, my child ! so beautiful, so glorious !” she exclaimed.

“You seemed to be resting very sweetly, dear mamma. You are better, I am sure,” said Annetta, bending lovingly over her.

“Yes, darling : but you look weary. Lie down beside me here, and rest.”

“I am not weary, mamma. I would rather sit here and watch you, as you sleep,” she answered.

The mother smiled, and, after remaining quiet a little while, she turned away, saying, “A strange stupor seems to overpower me, Nettie dear ;” and in a few moments she slept again. All night the storm beat wildly against the house ; and, to Annetta, the winds seemed wailing sad requiems for the dead. Toward morning, the invalid woke again ; but a change had passed over her.

Reaching out her hand, in a low, half-whispered tone, she said :

“My darling, God bless and comfort you now and ever ! Do n’t grieve, my child. But I am going ; they are waiting, they are calling !”

“O, my mother !” cried Annetta, falling upon her knees beside the bed.

“I need not charge you to watch over your poor father. I know, too well, how faithfully you will guard him every moment, while you live. God will reward you in his own good time ; perhaps never on earth, but O, so abundantly in heaven !”

Annetta could not speak ; she only wept and clung convulsively to the wasted form of her dying mother.

“Nettie, darling, be calm for my sake !” said the low voice again, as the sobs resounded through the room.

“I will. God help me to be all you could wish, to the last moment of life,” replied Annetta, making an effort to conquer every outbreak of grief, though it almost seemed that she, too, must die in the attempt.

“That is like my own brave child,” said her mother. “And now, Nettie,” continued she, slowly and with effort, “one more charge I leave you—my poor Henry. Watch and pray for him,

as I have done ; keep a home for him while you live. Some time he may grow weary with wandering, and come back to the old fireside ; tell him that I died, blessing him. Say that you will, dear."

"I will, mamma, I will," said Annetta, clasping her hands tightly, as if fearful she could not keep down the rising sobs.

"And O, my beloved daughter," continued the low voice, "above all, trust always in God ; never forget that you have one Friend who will never leave or forsake you, one who will care for you always. In his hands I leave you."

The sweet voice died away, the soft eyes were closed, and Annetta fancied she slept again. Feeling how greatly she needed that strength which comes from God alone, she knelt and poured out all her grief to Him who pitieth his children. Rising, she bent down to kiss the pale brow of the sleeper ; but O, it was so icy cold, and the sweet face wore the hue of death ! Calmly, without a sigh, the spirit had sought its heavenly home.

With a wild, despairing cry, Annetta fell back utterly unconscious. Fortunately, good, attentive Doctor Grey, was just then ascending the stairs. Hearing that cry of anguish, he hastily entered the room. Glancing at the pallid coun-

tenance of the mother, lying so still and cold among her pillows, he bent down, and, taking the unconscious girl in his arms, he murmured, compassionately, "Dear child! poor, dear child! I did not think the end was so near. Would that I had remained through the night!" Laying her tenderly upon a lounge in an adjoining room, he hastily dispatched Martha for his wife, and returned to administer restoratives to his young charge. When consciousness returned, kind Mrs. Grey was bending over her, a look of sympathy and affection upon her pleasant face. A few hours later, Mrs. Moorely arrived, and every attention was bestowed upon the sorrowing Annetta. The beloved sleeper was laid beside the dear ones for whom she had mourned, but the redeemed soul was reunited with theirs in a better world.

Doctor and Mrs. Grey proved themselves true friends to Annetta, aiding, cheering, and encouraging her through the weary days which followed; and at last, with a constant prayer for help within her heart and upon her lips, she rose up strengthened, resolved to take up life's burdens, bearing them onward till God should say, "It is enough; come up higher."

Her father required more care now than ever before. Growing physically weaker every day,

she was obliged to be always near to anticipate and supply every want. He appeared to miss his wife more and more every hour; and, pointing to her vacant chair, would look up into Annetta's face with a wistful, grieved expression. To add to her anxiety, there were times now when wild fancies ran riot in that disordered brain, and he gave indications of becoming violent. Often he would start suddenly from his chair, as if pursued by some enemy whom he feared. Then, wringing his hands, he would sink back again, weeping as if in the very bitterness of anguish. Annetta's voice and Annetta's touch alone had power to soothe him into quiet again. Tenderly she would murmur caressing words, as one would to a frightened child, until, exhausted, he would at last fall asleep, and the tired daughter would steal away to weep and pray alone. Doctor Grey frequently expressed fears that it was not safe for her to remain alone with him now, and urged her to allow him to again bring Mrs. Price to act as nurse.

"No, no," said she; "I have no fear; and no voice but mine can charm away these fancies; no other hand can minister half so well to all his needs. He looks to me for every thing. A stranger would annoy him, I am sure; and I wish to spare him all the vexations and little

trials which it is possible for me to turn aside. In watching over him, I am only performing a daughter's duty, and fulfilling my mother's dying wish."

"Well, Annetta, I certainly have no wish to interfere; but I am very anxious about the matter, and only wish to do for the best."

"I am sure of that, Doctor, and will prove to you yet, I hope, that I am equal to my self-imposed task."

"Your courage and determination will, doubtless, carry you through, my child; but do not tax your strength too much; and, by the way, do not forget that I hold myself in readiness to come to your assistance at any moment."

"Thank you, Doctor. I feel that I can depend upon you, and am rejoiced to know I have such a true friend left to me still."





CHAPTER XV.



FEW weeks after Mrs. Brasure's death, Lawrence Weber returned; and evening after evening found him in that lonely home; for he knew now that he loved most truly the dear girl who was as a ministering angel there. Sometimes he persuaded her to take long walks with him when the shades of evening fell, and her father, sleeping quietly in his easy-chair, would not miss her from his side.

She, too, knew now that she loved the man who cheered, comforted, and protected her tenderly, as Eugene had done in the olden time. And, as the weeks and months went by, life's dark shadows seemed lifted again. Her step grew quicker, her voice regained the olden ring, and her eyes brightened with the radiance of love's own light.

"Dear friend," said she; "yes, I love to call you friend, for there is so much meaning in the term when used in its truest sense. And O," continued she, earnestly, "I tremble now to think

what my life would have been without you. So dark, so cheerless! What a comfort you have been to me!"

He smiled down upon the sweet face raised so confidently to his, and, tenderly kissing the lips which quivered with emotion, promised again and again to love and cherish her always.

"O," said she, "it is so sweet to know that I shall not tread life's path alone! I have known sorrow, Lawrence, and have almost dared to wish I, too, might be soon called to my rest. But now that by my side one will walk who will care for me always, I feel that I may even yet know something of that brighter, happier portion of life, of which others speak in such glowing terms.

"You shall, indeed, dear Nettie. My first care shall always be for you. Your happiness, indeed, shall be my highest aim; and nothing but death can part us."

There was fervor and earnestness vibrating through every tone of his voice. Annetta listened, and her heart was filled with joy such as she had never known. Alas! how little we know of the workings of the human heart! How many such promises are made, yet never fulfilled! Fain would we linger over this portion of Annetta's life, the one bright, beautiful dream

shedding its radiance for a season over the path appointed her.

Lawrence Weber loved Annetta; and did not, for a moment, doubt the intensity of her own affection for him. Having awakened within her heart all the sweetest emotions of which that heart was capable, having won her in part from the grief which had oppressed her, and taught her to rely upon himself for comfort and happiness, he did not dream but that she would be ready and willing to unite her fate with his whenever he desired it. He knew he had already lingered too long, yet could not go back without bearing with him the one whom he loved.

At last, upon receiving a summons home which admitted of no delay, he resolved that the marriage must take place at once; and, accordingly, unfolded his plans to her that evening, never, for a moment, doubting her consent.

She was surprised and pained, deeply pained, to learn that he must go. In the midst of her new-found happiness, she had not paused to think of the probability of his ultimate return to Calcutta; and now, for the first time, saw, with startled eyes, the gulf of separation yawning between them. What wonder if she drew back, appalled, dreading to know the full extent of the trial awaiting her, yet feeling that, moment by

moment, it was too truly drawing nearer, and she so powerless to avert it.

"Lawrence," cried she, in a tremulous voice, "you will not, O, you will not, leave me now!"

"Leave you, Nettie? No, dear one; I am only waiting for your consent to take you with me to a home which, even now, awaits the coming of its mistress."

"And must I leave the dear parent who would never cease, while life lasted, to miss the daughter who has made his comfort the great study of life for years?"

"Annetta," said he, "you have, indeed, been a devoted daughter. You have performed many duties from which weaker natures would long since have drawn back. You must now consider what is due to yourself. You richly deserve a recompense at last."

"No, Lawrence; my work has been but a labor of love; my recompense, the consciousness of having tried to lighten, in my weak way, the burdens which pressed so heavily upon him. God help me to be faithful to the end!"

"We will not leave him comfortless, Annetta. Mrs. Price will care for him faithfully. She can be safely trusted. Every comfort shall be provided for him; and I am sure Doctor Grey will watch over him still."

"And I would never see him more. Death may come to him at any moment, and I not beside him in the last solemn hour. It can not, can not be. My work is not yet finished. I can not desert my post."

She had tried to appear calm, and had struggled for strength to bear up. But her voice died away in a low, gasping cry, while her hands were tightly clasped over her heart; for its wild throbbings seemed to stifle her very utterance.

"Annetta," urged her lover; "you have made sacrifices for others, can you not make this one for me?"

"I do! O, Lawrence, dear, dear friend! Am I not sacrificing more than words can tell, in giving you up? Can this poor heart of mine bear more than this?"

"Then why prolong its sufferings? O, my Annetta; come, come to love and happiness! It is your just reward, the recompense you so truly deserve. Come." And he extended his arms appealingly toward her.

"Lawrence, I can not, I can not," she moaned, sinking into his outstretched arms. Tenderly he held her a moment, urging her to go; but, rising suddenly, she turned away, murmuring again, with pallid lips, "It is in vain; I can never leave my helpless father."

"My love shall repay you, darling, for all you suffer in leaving him. Believe me, Nettie, it shall know no limitation. My constant aim shall be your happiness."

"Happiness!" she echoed, mournfully. "What! purchase happiness at such a cost? Ah, Lawrence, truly as I love you, deeply as I suffer in turning from the love you offer, I should never know an hour's rest or comfort separated from him. He needs all my care; and yet—and yet—it is so hard. O, how shall I bear it, how can I see you go?"

Again the poor suffering heart vainly strove to conquer the tide of feeling which welled up from its troubled depths. Pale and tearful, she sat there listening to his impassioned words, saying only: "Why tempt me still? I can not, can not leave him!"

Finding her resolute to the last, he left her in her loneliness and grief. How great that loneliness, how all-absorbing that grief, he never knew; nor can pen or tongue portray it in aught but its feeblest sense. Sitting with her face pressed close to the window, she watched his retreating form till it disappeared forever from her lingering gaze. O, the wail of agony that rose from her crushed heart as, in tones trembling with anguish, she murmured:

“‘Good-bye!’ Let me wait to hear the last, last sound of his feet!

Ah me! but I think in this life of ours the bitter outweighs the sweet.”

She did not know how she spent that long, long night. She only knew that she wept and prayed and struggled for strength to endure, power to overcome. She knew, too, she sat alone in silence and darkness, bowed down in weakness and woe, as hour after hour passed noiselessly on, rising up as the gray dawn came again, tottering with feeble steps to her own room to renew her petitions for help from above. When did the loving Father ever turn a deaf ear to the cries of his suffering children?

Annetta rose at last, pale, sad, weary, yet ready to go forward as God willed—ready for the work which he had given her to do. And yet there were hours of suffering still—nights spent in pacing the narrow limits of her little room, when the anguish of her heart could not be repressed; when, with hands tightly clasped, and eyes wearing an expression of deepest sorrow, she would exclaim, “O Lawrence! Lawrence! was it for this I learned to love you?”

Then, striving to subdue the longing for the love she had so highly prized, she would pray again for the comforts of Divine approval and

direction. Worn out, she would sink at last into feverish sleep, rising with the light of returning day, ready for the performance of all her duties ; and her stricken heart tried to find relief and rest in twining its shattered affections yet more closely about her afflicted father, upon whom was lavished every attention, every tenderness and watchful care which filial love could suggest.

A few months passed on, and Annetta felt that her charge was gradually fading from her sight. Toward the last, he became very gentle and docile ; the feverish fancies which had tormented him were gone now. He was quiet, and evinced something of the affectionate, confiding disposition of earlier days. He clung constantly to Annetta, and was never-contented when she was absent a moment from his side ; and every day she became more and more thankful that she had not left him.

Life ebbed slowly but surely away ; and at last he, too, was at rest. And as Annetta stood beside his grave, leaning upon the supporting arm of her kind friend, Doctor Grey, she felt that now she was indeed desolate and alone. But within her soul a still small voice whispered softly, "The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants : and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate."

"Thank God for the consolations of the Gos-

pel!" said she; "and in the words of the Psalmist will I say, 'How excellent is thy loving kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.'"

Returning to the house, Annetta went to the study where her father had always been accustomed to spend the greater part of the time. Every thing within it seemed to speak to her now of him. There stood the easy-chair, with the little stool beside it—how plainly it recalled old memories! for each had its own little history. Oppressed by the silence and gloom which pervaded the apartment, Annetta dwelt sadly upon the many changes which Time, in his onward flight, had brought to her, realizing painfully the present loneliness of her lot.

Kind Mrs. Moorely soon joined her niece, and, in her motherly way, urged her to make her house her future home.

"Your duties here are ended," said she, "and with us you will be much happier than in this dreary house, alone. Come, dear Annetta, come to my heart and my home. Both are open to you always," she added, persuasively.

"I believe it, dear auntie, and thank you for it. Indeed, words can not express my appreciation of all your kindness; but though grateful for it all, I must decline your offer."

“Do not say so, my dear girl ; we long to have you with us.”

“Gladly would I go, auntie, but I have still another duty to perform. Upon her dying bed, my mother bade me keep a home for Henry ; and, while I live, I must remain in the old house, still waiting and praying for him, as my mother wished.”

“But you do not know that he will ever come. Indeed, it is not at all likely that he will ; for in all probability he, too, has long since passed away,” urged Mrs. Moorely.

“It may be so ; still we have no positive assurance that such is the fact. I promised, and I must fulfill it. Dear auntie, let me do as my mother wished ; I shall be better satisfied.”

“But, Annetta, you can not live here alone, with no one but Martha near you. I really can not consent to your doing so.”

“Then let Mrs. Price come ; she is kind and motherly, and Doctor Grey is always near. May God bless and reward him for all his kindness to me !”

And so it was settled that Annetta should be permitted to carry out her own wishes. Mrs. Moorely remained till the good doctor brought Mrs. Price, after which she returned to her own home, promising to come often to see her niece.

Every day the doctor called, often bringing his wife to sit with Annetta. The old lady's pleasant chat helped to while away many an hour that otherwise would have seemed long and lonely. She felt strongly attached to Annetta, often speaking of her character in the highest terms, invariably concluding by calling her one of the best of her sex.

Annetta never spoke of Lawrence Weber; his name never passed her lips. That portion of her life was as a sealed book; she had buried it deep within the sepulcher of her heart:

“Hiding its secrets close; glad when another's hand
Found for itself a gem where hers found only sand.”

Not long, however, were her friends permitted to care for her. She who had lived but to care for others, was nearing the port of peace. Her heart was broken; she had no power now to tread life's path alone. And often, through all the long hours of the silent night, while others slept, she, in her wakefulness, prayed for both Lawrence and Henry. At times, she felt that Lawrence had deserted her too hastily, even cruelly. He should have borne more patiently with her, and shown a deeper respect for the feelings of an affectionate daughter toward a father so helpless and dependent as he. But she freely forgave

him now, and daily prayed for Heaven's richest blessings upon him.

One bright Spring morning, Doctor Grey came in early, and found Annetta lying quietly upon a low couch, beside the window, looking out upon the landscape to which nature was daily adding new beauties. She smiled as he entered, and held out her hand in token of welcome. Drawing up a chair, he seated himself beside her, and was soon talking in his pleasant, familiar manner. Rising to go, after quite a lengthy call, he bade her a cheerful good-morning, saying, as he left the room :

"I shall probably look in again in the course of the day, as that talkative little wife of mine desires me to bring her up to spend the afternoon."

"I am glad, indeed, to hear that, Doctor ; do n't fail to bring her early. You have no idea how rested and refreshed I always feel after her visits. There is something about her which always quiets and strengthens me."

"That being the case, she shall certainly be often found with you ; for she loves to come, I assure you. But really, I must be off ; my patients are doubtless wondering what has become of that old slow coach, known as Doctor Grey. So, for a few hours, good-bye ;" and he bowed himself out of the room.

Slowly he passed down the stairs, the bright, cheerful look fading from his countenance, giving place to a grave, thoughtful expression. Reaching the hall below, he stood a moment as if thinking intently; then turning to the right, he entered the library, and, seating himself at the table, hastily wrote a few lines, which were placed in an envelope, carefully directed and sealed. Placing the document in his pocket, he left the house, and was soon driving rapidly in the direction of the city. A few hours later, he reappeared, accompanied by his wife, who was gladly received by Annetta.

The next morning, the old well-known horse and buggy might have been seen standing in front of the depot, while the good doctor himself walked up and down the platform, evidently awaiting the arrival of some passenger upon the expected train, which soon came thundering into the station, attended with the usual noise and confusion.

Doctor Grey stepped aboard and disappeared in the interior of the last car, from which he soon emerged, accompanied by Mrs. Moorely.

"I am glad you responded so promptly to my note," said he.

"I could not have done otherwise," was the reply. "But, Doctor, it is so strange," added she,

as they passed with a quick step to the buggy in waiting.

A look of anxiety rested upon her face as she seated herself. The doctor gathered up the reins, and drove off at a brisk rate.

"Yes," said he, after a pause; "it is strange. And yet, on second thought, we can scarcely regard it so, after all."

"How long is it since you apprehended any danger, and upon what grounds do you base your fears now?" asked Mrs. Moorely.

"I have been watching her very closely," returned the doctor, "and have noticed a gradual sinking for some time; so gradual, indeed, as to be scarcely perceptible to a mere casual observer. Within the last day or two, the symptoms of failing strength have increased to such an extent that I thought it best to send for you."

"You were right, Doctor; I am glad you did so. I shall not leave her again, poor dear child! I long, yet almost dread, to see her again."

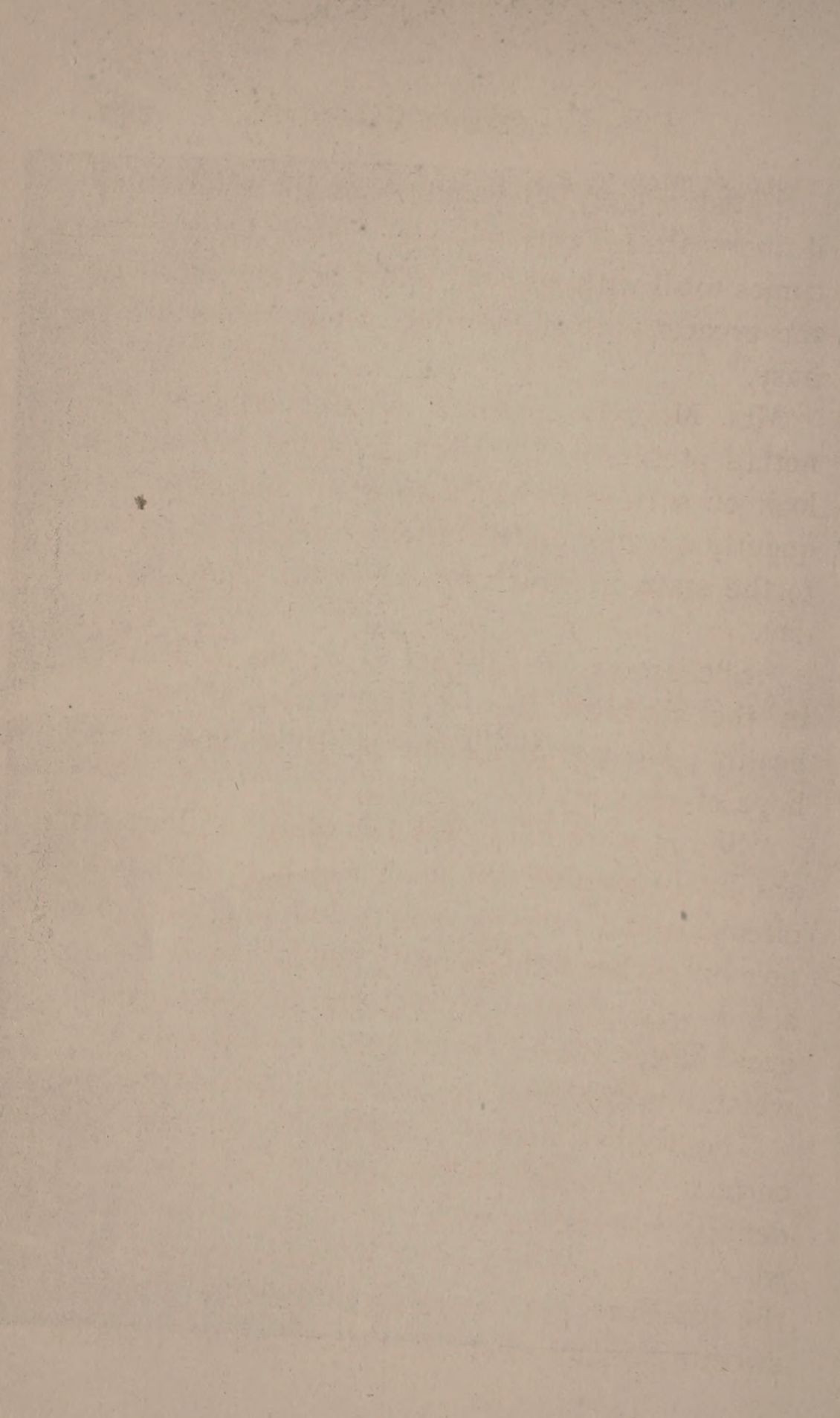
In a short time they arrived at the house, and Mrs. Moorely hastened at once to Annetta's room.

"O auntie, how glad I am! What a delightful surprise!" exclaimed Annetta, as Mrs. Moorely bent lovingly over her.

"I have come for quite a visit, my dear, being certain of my welcome," she replied.

ANNETTA WELCOMES MRS. MOORELY.





“That is very kind, auntie, and I shall enjoy it more than I can tell you. Mrs. Grey often comes to sit with me; but still I find myself alone the greater part of the time, when Mrs. Price is busy.”

Mrs. Moorely appeared very cheerful in Annetta's presence, but often regarded her with a look of sorrow and anxiety when she slept, frequently questioning the attentive doctor in regard to the state in which he found her from day to day.

“She seems so patient, so gentle, and never in the slightest degree despondent about her health. Do you think she is really beyond the hope of recovery?”

“She is worn out!” was the reply. “There is absolutely nothing left upon which to work; excitement, and care for others, has long kept her up; but at her father's death the last incentive to action was taken away, and she has been failing ever since. Life's powers are all consumed; that which remains is but the ashes of former vitality.”

The verdict rendered by the doctor appeared correct. Annetta did not seem ill; there was no definite ailment for which he might prescribe; it was a gradual fading away, a gentle passing from the shores of time to those of eternity. With a sweet assurance that rest was near, she felt that

in the beautiful words of the poet, she could truthfully say :

“A few more mornings, yet a few more mornings,
We'll watch the light's low dawning, dull and gray ;
A few more mornings, and we'll faintly murmur
To those who love us, 'T is our latest day.'
From weary brows will drop the life-worn mask ;
From tired hands will drop the half-done task.

“A few more mornings ! Amid distant dawns,
They who come after us will softly say :
'Where now the labor of those gone before us—
The recompense of all their burdened day ?'
They are not missed where they were always seen ;
All life moves on as if they had not been.

“A few more morns ! 'T will all be told, our story,
The heart that thrills to-day with love's dear pain,
Its suffering done. All done, the long endeavor,
The far-out yearning of the lofty brain.
There'll be in the low house where we lie down,
No love, no hate, no dream of high renown.

“A few more morns ! 'T will all be told, our story,
So sweet, so brief. Why war with changeless fate ?
Why cry for love ? Why spend our strength for glory ?
Why pray to God with prayer importunate ?
His centuries go ; we still must come, and pass
But as the shadows on the Summer grass.

“A few more morns ! Again, again in beauty
The earth will wear the splendor of her Springs,
While we, within the universe of spirits,
Will wander somewhere among viewless things.
Wondrous must be God's gift to compensate
For all we miss within our human fate.”

One evening, a few days after Mrs. Moorely's arrival, two gentlemen were seen walking rapidly

up the road leading to Annetta's home. Pausing at the gate, they stood a moment, conversing in low guarded tones. Entering at last, they passed with cautious tread round toward the rear of the house, evidently desirous of effecting a quiet entrance. Martha was in the kitchen, and, raising her eyes as they approached, suddenly started forward with a quick, startled cry. One of the gentlemen raised a warning finger as if to imply silence; but the signal came too late, and the words, "O, Master Henry! Master Henry!" rang through the house. The door of Annetta's room stood open to admit a free passage of air through the apartment, and as that cry fell upon their ears with startling distinctness, Mrs. Moorely sprang to her feet, while Annetta turned with blanched face and staring eyes to her aunt, making at the same time an effort to rise.

"It is Henry! O, God be praised, it is Henry!" she cried, with quivering lips.

"Be quiet, Nettie, be calm; there may be some mistake," said Mrs. Moorely, regaining her own self-possession, and gently seeking to prevent Annetta from rising.

"Let me go, O auntie, let me go to him. I know it is Henry! God has restored my brother to me. Hark!" she added, as a well-known voice was heard in the hall below; "O, it is the dear,

dear boy at last!" and, with tottering steps, she tried to reach the door, calling in tremulous tones as she went, "O Henry, Henry!"

Mrs. Moorely threw one arm around the trembling form, and sought to quiet her; but the quick ear of the long-absent brother caught the sound of his own name as it fell from his sister's lips, and with a bound he cleared the passage and sprang up the stairs. She raised her eyes to his as he reached the landing. One short cry, one quick, eager movement toward him, and she fell fainting in his arms. Tenderly he kissed the white upturned face, and bore her back to her couch, while her aunt and Mrs. Price (who had hurried in upon hearing the commotion) hastened to administer restoratives. And now another advanced and stood beside her, his face wearing a look of surprise and pain, as he noted the changes which sorrow and illness had wrought upon the fair young girl since last they met. Upon returning to consciousness, Annetta's first inquiry was for Henry.

"Is it true? O, tell me it is not a dream!" she said, as her eyes fell first upon her aunt, watching, with anxious look, for the first signs of returning life.

For answer, Henry knelt down beside the low couch and took her hand in his, unable, for the

time, to conquer his emotion sufficiently to speak. She pushed back the waves of soft brown hair from his forehead, and gazed long and tenderly into the dark eyes which she had so often feared were long since closed forever upon earthly scenes. She asked no questions, and seemed perfectly contented to lie quietly there, never wearying of gazing upon the face of the returned wanderer.

"Nettie, darling," said he, "there is another waiting for a welcome from you; one who has never failed us, even in the hour of utmost need. When you are stronger, I have much to tell of his recent goodness to me."

Annetta raised her head, and Henry's companion advanced.

"Mr. Reed!" she exclaimed, extending her hand. "Welcome, welcome home; and may God reward you for past favors to us all, and for every kindness shown to this dear, long-lost brother!"

The following day Annetta seemed much stronger; and Henry drew her chair into the pleasantest corner of her cheerful room, and seated himself beside her. Each had much to relate in regard to the past, with numberless questions to ask and answer.

Annetta told him of all the changes which had

befallen their once happy family, recounting the sad fate of the beloved brother and sister, together with the last days and final departure of the afflicted parents to the better land.

“Amid it all,” said she, “God has been very merciful to us, for he has taken them to himself. Each fell asleep with the blessed assurance of a life beyond the grave. Our mother found sweet comfort in trusting in Him who left for us the precious promises of the Gospel. But, O Henry,” continued she, with tearful eyes, “words can never convey to you the constant longing and patient watching and waiting through which she daily passed for you. Night after night she wept and prayed for her absent boy ; and, Henry, she left a message for you. In her last hours she bade me keep a home for you while I lived ; for, said she, ‘Some time he may grow weary with wandering, and return to the fireside of home ; and if he ever comes, tell him I died blessing him.’ Yes, Henry, a mother’s dying blessing rests upon you.”

Henry bowed his head, and his frame shook with the emotions which he could not suppress. Annetta waited in silence till this outburst of feeling subsided, and some degree of calmness returned ; then, laying her hand upon his head, said, gently : “Tell me about yourself, Henry.

How has time dealt with you during all these years? Has fortune smiled upon you, and have you known more of joy than sorrow?"

"Can you ask, dear sister? Had fortune smiled upon me, think you I would have been so long a wanderer?"

"Tell me about it, Henry. Give to your sister your entire confidence, will you not?"

"Nothing shall be hidden from you, dear Nettie. You shall know all, even though the recital brings the blush of shame to my cheek. My only dread is of paining you."

"I have borne it all already, brother. I have suffered for you in times past; but the joy of having you with me now, more than compensates for it all. My prayers have been answered. I have kept a home and a warm welcome for you, according to our mother's wish, and God has led you to the old place at last. How sweet, how precious a reward!"

He told her, then, of all the changes he too had known since he left his home to become a wanderer, he knew not where. He related how, when the broad ocean rolled between him and his native land, he had been prostrated by sickness, a stranger in a strange land, without either money or friends; and how he missed the tender care and watchful solicitude of the dear ones at home.

During his illness, he resolved to retrace his steps as soon as he should feel able to bear the journey ; but upon his recovery, a cowardly pride took possession of him, and he could not summon up sufficient manly strength to enable him to carry his resolution into effect ; feeling that, having never been of any real benefit to any one, but rather an unprofitable source of trouble to all, he resolved to make some effort to become a better and more useful man, worthy of the name he bore. He sought long and diligently for some employment which should be the first round of the ladder by means of which he hoped to reach an elevated position, one of which he might be justly proud. This accomplished, he would then return to his home, able to prove to his friends that he had redeemed himself from the thralldom of indolence and selfishness, two characteristics of which he knew himself possessed. But as time passed on, and disappointment after disappointment crowded upon him, meeting him at every turn, he became disheartened, then reckless, and finally, fell into disreputable company ; and was fast following the steps of those who were not slow in leading him into ways of sin. He soon wearied of their ceaseless round of pleasure-seeking, however, and resolved to break away from the company of those of whom he

knew his mother and sister would have been ashamed. Renewing his search for honorable and lucrative employment, and meeting with no better success than before, he again gave up in despair, and suffered himself to be persuaded into joining his former companions, who were about to start on a whaling voyage, with the expectation of being "out on the ocean sailing" for a period of three years at least.

"Why war with fate?" said he. "Three years will soon pass; and possibly Dame Fortune may then condescend to bestow her favors upon me. For the present, there seems to be no other way open for me." And so, feeling that, under such circumstances, his well-being was of no particular consequence to any one, and his family having probably concluded long ago that he no longer lived, he started, with scarcely a full realization of the consequences of the rash act.

To one raised in the lap of luxury, such a voyage offers few pleasures and many hardships. Troubles gathered about the pathway of the impulsive adventurer, and many a weary hour was spent in regretting the step he had so thoughtlessly taken. But regrets were of no avail; and the years dragged slowly on, each seeming longer than its predecessor—containing, too, a double portion of hardships and daily toil.

“At last,” said Henry, with a sigh of relief, “after an absence of nearly four years, I stood once more upon shore; and I think nothing could have induced me to try a seafaring life again. Through the influence of one of the officers, I obtained a situation as clerk in a mercantile house in ——. Another year was fast adding its own little history to the record of past time, and I began to feel that at last I was in a position which might eventually result in the realization of all the fond hopes and dreams in which I had formerly indulged. About this time, I began a systematic course of saving, with the idea of being able, in time, to repurchase Clifton Place; but my plans were speedily and unexpectedly changed. Upon going to my place of business, one morning, I was told that a gentleman was waiting to see me. Judge of my surprise, upon entering the office, to find Mr. Reed standing before me. The first surprise over, he told me of his travels during the year, and the efforts he had every-where made to discover my whereabouts, meeting at last with success through the medium of an agent traveling through the country for our house.

“Through him, Nettie, I learned of all the trials through which you had been called to pass; for auntie had written full particulars to Cousin

Godfrey. My heart bled for you, dear sister, and I needed no persuasions to hasten at once to you, full of self-accusations for having remained so long away; and you, with a sister's loving kindness, have accorded to the returning prodigal full pardon, and a sweet welcome home."

Annetta had listened to Henry's recital with tearful interest, often interrupting him with questions and words of sympathy and love.

Godfrey Moorely arrived a few hours later, having gone directly home first, not knowing his mother was with Annetta. The dear invalid seemed very happy now, and really appeared to gather new strength and energy with each passing day. Leaning upon Henry's arm, she would walk out on pleasant days, returning with sparkling eyes and a brighter color deepening on her cheek.

Scarcely a day passed without some expression of thankfulness gushing up from her full heart for the joy of his presence. Her eyes often followed his movements about the house with a glad, happy expression, truly beautiful. Her friends looked on, quite delighted with the happy change which his return had wrought, and began to entertain hopes of her recovery, with the exception of Doctor Grey. He said but little, yet regarded every change, however slight, with

watchful eye, never relaxing for a single day his careful attention.

"Joy is a ready restorer. Only see how bright she looks to-day!" exclaimed Mrs. Moorely, as Annetta came toward the house, supported by Henry's strong arm.

The good doctor shook his head, without speaking.

"But do n't you predict good results from all this?" she asked.

"Time only can show; but I fear that a reaction may yet take place. She is very frail; a very little thing may change all," said he.

"But we will be so careful; we will guard her so tenderly," urged Mrs. Moorely.

"We will, indeed; and can only hope for the best," returned the doctor.

A few happy weeks passed on, and Annetta had continued to improve. But one evening she did not seem so well. A slight cold produced a night of feverish unrest, followed by weariness and languor, which confined her to her room the following day. The next and the next rolled round, and she was still a prisoner; and soon she found herself unable to rise. Gradually the new-born strength gave place again to the old weakness; and there were no more pleasant walks and rides, no more delightful evenings spent in

the cozy little parlor. These were all given up, and the hopes of those who watched so carefully over her were rudely shattered. She never complained; was always patient, gentle, and ever thoughtful for the comfort of those about her. Henry was very devoted in his attentions, never seeming to grow weary of waiting upon her, or contriving means for making the time pass as pleasantly as possible.

The warm June days had come now, and the air was scented with the fragrance of the flowers which grew beneath her window. Henry raised her in his arms, and bore her, for the last time, to her easy-chair, that she might look once more upon the familiar scenes around her home.

"My little garden!" said she, "how carefully Eugene tended it long ago! how much pride he took in its beauty! Dear brother, I shall soon meet them all beyond the boundaries of time."

She soon grew weary, and was carried back to her bed. The next evening, Mrs. Moorely sat holding the little hand in hers, tearfully watching the gray shadows of death stealing over the fair young face. Henry sat beside her, tenderly supporting her head upon his breast, struggling the while to stifle the sobs which welled up from his heart, lest their utterance should grieve her. Yet the deep silence was broken now and then by the

sounds of sorrow which burst uncontrollably from the lips of the watchers. Doctor Grey and his wife were there; so, too, were Godfrey and Mr. Reed. The faithful Martha, who had loved the dear girl from her infancy, knelt on the floor at the foot of the bed, weeping bitterly. She had taken leave of them all, and lay silently waiting for the opening of the gates which should admit her to that realm where she should "see the King in his beauty." The glory of the full moon shone calmly upon the white, moveless features, so beautiful in their stillness.

No father or mother was with her in that solemn hour; but they were waiting with sister and brother beyond the river. And within that chamber of death, sincere hearts, tearful eyes, and tender voices were not wanting. Henry was not the only mourner there, for all present were attached to the gentle Annetta. To the borders of the river they accompanied her; with a smile, she drew near; her white lips parted, the dark eyes closed upon the scenes of earth, and the freed soul fled forever from its prison-house of clay. The long-tried spirit, that had lived so vivid a life, leaped up from the cold hearth-stone, forsaking forever the consumed tenement.



CHAPTER XVI.

TEN years have passed since the soul of Annetta Brasure took its flight to the world of glorified spirits. Through ten long Winters the snows have drifted upon her grave, and through as many Summers the birds have sung among the branches of the willow drooping over the white tablet which marks the place of her rest; but in that home where she shall forever sing the praises of the God whom she delighted to serve, "a day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." And now let me ask you, dear reader, to cross once more the billowy ocean, and traverse with me the distance intervening between that lowly grave and the city of Calcutta.

Upon one of the pleasantest streets in a fashionable part of the city stands a row of handsome houses; adorned with ornaments, porticoes, and arcades, they seem like very palaces. In the elegantly furnished saloon of one which

boasts even rarer attractions than its neighbors possess, sits a fair-haired, matronly-looking woman, in company with her two daughters, the eldest, a tall, dark, dignified young lady ; the other, an impulsive, merry-hearted, blue-eyed girl of sixteen.

"Mother," exclaimed the latter, suddenly looking up from the book she had been reading, "why is it that Uncle Lawrence does not marry? I am sure there are plenty of ladies of all ages, sizes, and conditions, who would be willing to take him for better or worse ; indeed, I know of several who have been angling for him this long time."

"My dear," replied the lady, "do not speak in that manner ; it is scarcely proper."

"O, never mind the propriety or elegance of the speech just now, mother. I am more interested in the subject of my remarks than in the proper mode of expression. Do you know, mother, why he remains so long in a state of single blessedness? He is rich enough to support a wife in splendid style."

"I do not think that has any thing to do with his remaining a bachelor," said the elder sister.

"Well, something has, at all events ; and I'm very certain it is not because he does not appreciate woman," said the sprightly Kate.

"No, indeed. I never knew any one who

evinced, upon all occasions, so much respect and true appreciation of the sex," replied Julia.

"And his politeness and veneration (I might almost call it) is not confined to a few; he treats every woman as if she were a queen. You should have seen him this morning, as he picked up a book that my music-teacher accidentally dropped upon the steps as she came up. He returned it with a smile and a bow worthy of a prince."

"And only a week ago," said Julia, "I saw him help a poorly clad, weary-looking woman into a coach with as respectful an air as if she were the first lady in the land."

"How strange! He is so grave, too, and melancholy. I have often fancied he must have passed through some great sorrow in his younger days. He is really growing quite gray, of late! Mother, don't you know any thing of his life before he came to live with us?" And she turned with an inquiring look to her mother.

Mrs. Henderson had appeared lost in thought while her daughters were talking; the embroidery upon which she worked, lay idly in her lap, and her eyes wore a far-away look. As Kate repeated her question, she turned to her with a smile, saying:

"I only know that in his youth he met with a great disappointment, which has clouded his life

ever since. Of the particulars I have never been informed; he has always avoided the subject, and I would not question him; but I know that he has suffered."

"Was it long ago?"

"Yes: while you were but a little child, Katie. He went away from home, and was absent a long time. After his return, we noticed the great change which had come upon him, transforming the gay, pleasant, light-hearted young man into the quiet, gloomy person he has been ever since."

"I would love to know the story, mother. Do you think he would tell it now?" asked Katie, with a pitying look in her beautiful eyes.

"I do not know, Katie; but I am sure I would not like to ask him to bring forth the secret sorrows of his heart," replied Mrs. Henderson.

"But, mother, you know he never refuses me any thing; he is always so good and kind. He would not think for a moment, I am sure, that idle curiosity prompted me to ask for the story. I have so often felt that I would love to say or do something to let in a little sunshine which should help to cheer and brighten the heart grieving over some mournful past!"

A moment later, the door opened, and a fine-looking man entered the room. Addressing a few pleasant words to the group he found there,

he passed on to the farther end of the large apartment, and threw himself upon a softly cushioned lounge. As the last faint glimmer of day disappeared, giving place to the quiet shadows of evening, Mrs. Henderson rose to ring for lights.

"Do n't, mother," whispered Kate, laying her hand upon her mother's arm; "the darkness is much more appropriate for that story, you know, than the glare of lights."

Going quietly up to the lounge where her uncle was resting, she drew a low ottoman beside it, and, seating herself, began caressingly passing her fingers through the locks of luxuriant hair, among which was seen many a silvery thread. She often came to him in that childish, caressing way, and the loving little niece had become very dear to him.

"Uncle Lawrence," said she softly, "what makes you so sad?"

"Do you think me sad, little one?" he asked.

"Yes: and I often wonder why it is so, when you have so much to make you happy. And I often wish, too, that I could help or comfort you. Tell me, uncle, is there nothing we can do? Are you not happy with us?"

"As happy as I ever expect to be anywhere while I live, Katie!" said he sadly.

"But, why not as happy as you used to be? I

have heard mother speak of a time when you were the gayest of all her brothers."

"That was long ago, Katie—when I was younger by more than ten years."

"But growing older does not always sadden one. I am sure that, with some, the last days of life are the best and happiest."

"Yes: when the heart is free from sorrow or remorse. Trouble, my dear child, causes one to grow old and weary much faster than the passage of years."

"But have you seen so much trouble, Uncle Lawrence? And why do you speak of remorse? Surely, you have done nothing for which you need shed a repentant tear!"

"Ah, Katie, every wrong act calls for penitential tears; but even these can never wash away my sin. I am not deserving of even an hour's happiness."

"Tell me about it, uncle, won't you?" And the beautiful eyes looked appealingly into his.

He was silent a moment; and then, as if won by her resistless entreaties, said softly: "Yes, Katie, I will tell you. It is a sad story, one which carries me back many years; but I live it all over again in memory every day, and the recital will be no more than giving voice to the thoughts which are ever present with me.

“About twelve years ago, I made the acquaintance of a most estimable young man, who, with his wife, then a happy bride of but a few weeks, had lately come to our city, sent out from New York by the firm in which I, too, had an interest. I soon became attached to William Howard and his lovely wife, and came to regard them as my best and truest friends, and spent many happy hours in their company. I frequently heard them speak of those whom they had left in their distant home—so frequently, indeed, that, in a short time, I knew by name each member of the household band. Misfortunes of a pecuniary nature had befallen the father some years previous, which was followed by loss of health and reason. The support of the family depended mainly upon the eldest son and daughter. The mother was an invalid, and the youngest daughter became, from her very childhood, the ministering angel to her afflicted parents. One son suddenly left home for reasons unknown, and was not heard from for many years, not until after the death of his parents; and is now the only survivor of the family. After several years of hardship and unremitting toil, the condition of the family improved somewhat, and Isabel ceased giving the lessons in music and painting, by which she had aided so long in

providing for the rest ; Eugene, the eldest son, being able then to provide well for all.

“Isabel married William Howard, and came, as I have already told you, a happy bride to Calcutta. After remaining a year among us, they returned to their native city ; and I, having business there at that time, accompanied them. During our journey I became still more interested in them. At the port where we landed they were unexpectedly met by their brother Eugene. The meeting was a joyous one in every sense. We took the first train bound for the city in which they resided, expecting to arrive at their home the same evening. But O, Katie, how often in this world of change are our brightest hopes and expectations met by bitter disappointment ! While yet some miles from the city, the train was hurled down an embankment, and my dear friends were among the killed.”

“O, uncle !” exclaimed Katie, clasping her hands, while tears of sympathy filled her eyes.

“Yes, Katie ; in one moment they were hurried from time to eternity. Eugene, whom I had known but a few hours, yet loved even then, lived a short time, and with his latest breath gave me his dying message for those at home. With feelings that tongue can never describe, I bore the remains to the home where waited, in

agony and woe too deep for words, those to whom I had previously sent intelligence of this fearful calamity. There I first met Annetta Brasure, the younger sister of whom I had heard so often. To see her was to love her. I can never describe the emotions which filled my heart, as I beheld her, moaning and weeping in bitter sorrow over the cold forms of those for whom she had been waiting in joyous anticipation of a happy reunion. To her I repeated Eugene's dying words, and offered all the aid and sympathy which I could render. And O, Katie, it was very, very little compared with the tide of sympathetic feeling that surged up from my heart!

"After a few weeks, during which time I had often met Annetta, I was called upon business to a distant part of the country, and was detained some time. Upon my return, I immediately repaired to the home of my afflicted friends. As I approached the house, I noticed that the window where I had been accustomed to seeing Annetta was closed, and the place wrapped in prison-like silence. My summons was answered, as usual, by the old servant. She did not speak in answer to my inquiry for Annetta, but pointed silently to the apartment where I had usually met her. I passed in, a feeling of sadness and awe pressing strangely upon me. Beside the

hearth sat her father, an old man now, bowed down by the weight of years and infirmities. On the opposite side stood a vacant chair, near which knelt Annetta, as if engaged in prayer. She did not observe my entrance, and I stood gazing wonderingly at them both. The feeble old man pointed every now and then to the vacant chair, murmuring brokenly, 'My wife!'

"I was about to withdraw, feeling that my presence was perhaps an intrusion, when Annetta arose and turned toward me. She looked paler and sadder than I had yet seen her, and a wan smile crept to her lips as she advanced to welcome me. In few words, she told me of her dear mother's death; how, alone, she watched and prayed beside her bed; how, at last, in the midst of a wailing storm without, and the drear darkness and silence within, her spirit passed away. Her father missed the wife of his youth from her accustomed place, and mourned unceasingly for the companion of his life.

"Annetta finished her brief recital, and the tears trickled slowly down her pale cheeks. With a deep sigh, she wiped them hastily away, and mechanically took up her work. Gently I drew it away, saying:

"'Annetta, dear friend, you need rest.'

"'No, no,' said she; 'it is for him, my poor

father, who is all that is left me now on earth.'

"I realized then, more truly than ever before, that sympathy was not the only feeling which had quickened into life at the touch of the sad young girl before me; and there, in the gloom of that quiet room, with the old man moaning in his chair, I told the story of my love. She gazed upon me like one bewildered, her chest heaved, and her voice quivered with intensity of feeling, as she murmured, 'For me! can it be that love remains for me?'

"There are those, Katie, in the world, from whom hope has so long been excluded, that they fail to comprehend happiness when at last it dawns upon them. It was so with Annetta; but when the poor, lone heart took in the full sense of the joy yet in store for her, her ecstasy was almost child-like in its sweet simplicity. She loved suddenly; her heart had been slumbering, but now the lethargy had passed away, and she realized that there was a new, unstirred depth of feeling there, which had never before awakened to assert its power over her life. But now she understood the bliss which springs from loving and being loved. From that hour, Annetta was changed; she seemed to grow younger and more beautiful. Her voice took a fuller, richer tone,

and upon her cheek the rosy flush came and went.

“We met daily. I shared her care for her aged father, and strove to divert and interest him. One morning, a short time after these events, I received a sudden summons home. The call was an imperative one, and I could not choose but obey it at once. I hastened to Annetta, and entreated that our marriage be consummated without delay, as I could not think of leaving her. Annetta looked at me in silence, an expression of anxiety and pain spreading itself over her countenance. I smiled cheerfully as I took her hand, saying:

“‘We shall see many lands far more beautiful than this. Ah, my Annetta, there is much in store for you. Let us hasten our preparations for departure.’

“Tears filled her beautiful eyes as she turned toward her father, who had become too infirm to hear us now; our voices were meaningless to him.

“‘My father,’ said she; ‘can he bear the journey?’

“‘Dearest,’ said I, ‘we can not take him with us. Our path in life will henceforth be far removed from that which you have formerly trod. He could not survive the journey. We must

leave him here, in the care of competent persons. It is for the best, Annetta. Your life has been made up of sacrifices ; it is but right you should now know something of its pleasures.'

" 'Leave my father !' exclaimed she.

" 'We will not leave him comfortless, my Annetta,' said I. 'We will settle a competence upon him amply sufficient for all his wants ; we will confide him to careful hands, and God will watch over him.'

" Paler and yet paler grew Annetta's face, the light faded from the dark eyes, her lips quivered, and her voice had a strange, unnatural sound, as she replied :

" 'Tempt me not. O Lawrence, I can never, never leave him !'

" 'Then,' cried I, impulsively, 'Annetta, you never truly loved me.'

" One wild, reproachful glance—one quick, gasping cry—and the poor, tried heart gave vent to a torrent of tears. I drew her close to my heart ; reasoned long and earnestly, urged, entreated—all to no purpose. Love's sophistry failed to win her from her purpose. The conflict was a fearful one. It ended ; and youth, hope, and happiness faded forever away, leaving her a pale, sad, lonely woman, bereft of all life's dearest joys. With a trembling, yet determined hand,

she put away all her dreams of bliss, drove back all the sweet impulses of her nature, turning resolutely away from the bright future I prayed her to enter with me.

“‘I am all that he has,’ she cried; ‘we are alone in the world; we will never be parted by any thing but death. Help me, O my God, to bear it!’

“Further entreaty was useless. I left her; but, just before I sailed, I dispatched a note, full of protestations of ardent, undying love, begging her to relent. Her answer was brief, written evidently with a trembling hand, and contained only these words:

“‘Farewell! My place is beside my father, whom my mother, upon her dying bed, committed to my care. My work is to fulfill that trust, and to keep a home for the brother for whom I still watch and pray. My one bright dream of life is over. Happiness is not for me. I have loved you truly, and shall still love and pray for you while God gives me life. ANNETTA.’

“Maddened by her persistent refusal, I left the place; but, though I have since traveled in distant lands, and mingled in varied, ever-changing scenes, I could not banish from my heart the memory of Annetta. Her sad look haunted me wherever I went, and her sweet, low voice

mingled with every sound that fell upon my ear. I now beheld the true beauty of her character. Such filial devotion, such an exalted sense of duty as her conduct displayed, now appeared to me worthy the highest tribute of praise. In pitiable contrast, my own selfishness stood revealed.

“Before a year had passed, urged by unconquerable love and remorse, I resolved to return and make amends for my hasty, uncalled-for desertion; for, in no milder terms, could I speak of it now. As I turned my face once more toward the home of my beloved, all my affection seemed to rush with a new power upon me, urging me onward with all possible speed. I arrived in the well-known city as the shades of evening fell, shrouding all things in a mantle of darkness. Anxious to prove my contrition for having left her in loneliness and grief, I at once bent my steps toward her quiet home. As I drew near, I noticed that the house and grounds seemed deserted and lone, the echo of my foot-fall the only sound that broke the silence. With throbbing heart, I knocked eagerly for admittance; but the summons remained unanswered. I tried the door; it yielded to my touch. I entered, and sought the well-remembered room; it was empty. I called wildly upon Annetta’s

name; echo only answered the call. I ran from room to room; all were alike deserted and still. A silence like that of death reigned throughout the place, and I stood like one in despair. Could it be that Annetta had been a second time snatched from me?

“Suddenly the thought occurred to me that possibly the old man might, ere this, have joined his wife in the better land, and Annetta have found a brighter, more genial home elsewhere.

“I left the house; the heavy door slammed to, with a weird sound which caused a shiver to pass over me. I hastened to the hotel near by, and, taking the proprietor aside, questioned him in regard to the former inmates of the old house now so deserted and lone. Drawing my arm within his, he drew me out into the open air; and, pointing up to the starry heavens, solemnly said, ‘They are there!’ O, the bitter sorrow of that moment, Katie! I can not tell you how keen, how poignant it was. After I had, in a measure, recovered my composure, he guided me to the little church-yard, where slept my Annetta beside her aged parents. Under that moonlit sky I learned how faithfully she had watched the last days of her father, for whom she had sacrificed the brightest hope of life. Tenderly she performed every duty, anticipating every

want, never faltering or turning for a moment away from the task. He died, his cold hand in hers. A faint glimmer of reason returned ere the last hour came; and it was to her a precious privilege to care for him then, and to hear him murmur, caressingly, 'My beloved daughter.' His last blessing given, he raised his dim eyes toward heaven, and, exclaiming, 'My wife!' fell asleep.

"Annetta, my poor, darling Annetta, lived on in that silent, dreary home a few short months; then sweetly and peacefully folded her hands upon her bosom, and went home. I listened in silence to the sad story, then asked to be alone with the dead.

"O, Annetta! couldst thou but know the bitter remorse of the heart that loved you! Hours passed, and still I lingered by her grave, thinking of the many hours we had passed together near the resting-places of Eugene, William, and Isabel, an unbroken band now in the Redeemer's kingdom. Sadly I thought of the long, long days of sorrow and loneliness through which she passed after I left her. Nobly she fulfilled her mission with woman's truest devotion; and O, how great must be her reward! Truly, of her work she had no need to be ashamed when the words, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord,' fell upon

her ear. Again I left the place, bearing with me a heavy, grief-laden heart. Long years have passed; and yet Annetta's memory still lives. Deep within my heart lies buried the remembrance of those earlier years, and ever within my ears echo the low tones of the voice I loved. Wherever I go, remorse is ever present with me; for I left her in sorrow, left her to die—I who had loved her truly but selfishly. The past can never be blotted out, the future must still be but a weary waiting for the end. I never look upon a pale, sad woman, without thinking that her youthful days may, like Annetta's, have been blighted by the chilling blasts of trial and despair. Rest thee sweetly, my Annetta!"



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